This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

Princeton University Library
32101 063607954

Library of

Princeton University.
Friends of the
Princeton Library
The gift of

Willard Thorp

Millicent Sloat
112 Chestnut St
Rutherford
N J -

Willard Sloan

ON STEEL BY JOHN SARTAIN.—PHILAD.

H. J. Moore.

WILD NELL,

THE

WHITE MOUNTAIN GIRL.

BY MRS. H. J. MOORE,

AUTHOR OF "THE GOLDEN LEGACY, A STORY OF LIFE'S PHASES;" "ANNA CLAYTON, OR THE MOTHER'S TRIAL," ETC. ETC.

WITH A STEEL PORTRAIT OF THE AUTHOR.

"Let high birth triumph! what can be more great?
Nothing—but *merit* in a low estate."—YOUNG.

ILLUSTRATED.

NEW-YORK: SHELDON & COMPANY, 115 NASSAU ST.
PHILADELPHIA: J. B. LIPPINCOTT & COMPANY.
BOSTON: BROWN & TAGGARD.

1860.

(RECAP)

Entered, according to Act of Congress, in the year 1860, by

MRS. H. J. MOORE,

in the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the United States for the State of Massachusetts.

JOHN A. GRAY,
Printer & Stereotyper,
16 and 18 Jacob St.

PREFACE.

As in the hands of a skillful lapidary, the little stone, which had seemed to our unpracticed eye insignificant and worthless, is transformed into the lustrous diamond, sparkling and flashing with regal splendor, so in life, the richest gems are sometimes found hidden beneath a rough exterior, which, when subjected to the refining process of education, aided and crowned by the great purifier, Religion, come forth from the crucible, radiant in beauty, and inexhaustible in a wealth far exceeding nature's rarest and most precious stones.

Such a gem was "WILD NELL," the heroine of the following pages, and in tracing her life, from its first, rude uncultivated state, to a degree of moral perfection too seldom attained here, the author has aimed to show the importance of a right culture of the mind and heart.

Pride, arising either from birth, station or wealth, or all combined, holds a potent sway in this our land; crushing in its despotic grasp, the noblest intellects, and blighting the holiest, purest affections of our nature, with its upas breath. But, thank God, there is a power mightier even than this; a power which shall yet destroy the strongholds, and break down the barriers which pride has raised up for its own defense; the time shall yet come—nay, it is even now come—when Religion with

her handmaid Education shall, like the skillful lapidary, give to each jewel its own intrinsic worth; when the richly stored mind shall far outweigh golden laded coffers, and the rightly guided heart be prized "above rubies."

Early judicious training, like that which NELL received when taken from her wild home, though seldom rewarded in a like brilliant manner, will yet, nevertheless, develop graces of mind and heart, which might otherwise have lain hidden from sight forever. Of what transcendent importance then does it become to "train up a child in the way he should go;" to cultivate all those nicer, finer sensibilities of his nature, which not even "the fall" from that Godlike image in which he was made has eradicated. To the mothers of our land is intrusted a work which angels well might covet; a work higher and loftier than the most inspired genius could ever reach; a work commenced here to be perfected and crowned hereafter.

Should the perusal of "WILD NELL," a simple child of nature developed by the light of truth and knowledge into glorious woman, awaken hope, stimulate effort, and lead any on in their upward way, our highest desires will have been accomplished, and our humble effort not been made in vain.

BOSTON, 1860.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I. PAGE

A rural village—The White Mountains in former years—Walter Everson's sudden departure — The country doctor — A strange apparition—"Mammy wants ye"—Wild Nell, and the doctor's saddlebags—The fortune-teller's welcome, . 1

CHAPTER II.

Inside of the witch's hut—Dr. Jepson's interview with Esther Cram—The patient—Fortune-telling and physic—Midnight on the mountain—The solitary watcher—The witch's prophecy, ... 18

CHAPTER III.

Sunrise upon the mountain—The mountain girl's welcome to the day—Nell and her pet "Lolo"—Agile descent—Dr. Jepson's admiration and Nellie's defiant mood — "Night battles and morning wins"—Walter Everson and the doctor—Nell's astonishment, ... 25

CHAPTER IV.

Esther Cram's soliloquy—Nell reasoning with her mother—Ravings of delirium—Final resolve—Life's great mystery unfolding—The sprained foot—Conflicting emotions—Sunset upon the mountain—Night within the hut—Aid of spirits invoked, ... 31

CHAPTER V. PAGE

Adoniram Jepson—Returns to reason—The mystery—Explanation of Walter Everson's disaster—Nell's sensitiveness—Craving for love—Blissful hopes—A ludicrous idea—The fortune-teller's reproof—Past and future, ... 41

CHAPTER VI.

A rough experience—Romance—Cicely Everson's curiosity—An awkward position—Doubtful expediency—Fortune-telling—The heart's ideal—Worldly wisdom—Marriages of convenience—A profession—Going abroad, ... 51

CHAPTER VII.

Domestic tête-à-tête—A munificent fee—Sudden craving—The doctor's self-accusation—Joyful proposal and anticipations—Wild Nell to be educated—Autumn leaves—The spirit of unrest awakened—False teachings—Nell's loneliness—Her earnest desire to go to school—Esther Cram's remonstrance—Her decision, ... 61

CHAPTER VIII.

Mrs. Jepson's return home—Early associations—Esther Cram and her child forgotten—A stormy remembrancer—The mountain in its glory—Dr. Jepson and his "hired man" John commence their search—John's indignation—The empty hut, ... 70

CHAPTER IX.

Nell and her mother—The fortune-teller resolves upon flight—Exhortation to the spirits—Journey commenced—Nell's first entrance into the world—Dinah and her mistress—Esther Cram's interview with Cicely Everson and her lover—Strange developments—The picture—The fortune-teller's despair, ... 79

CHAPTER X. PAGE

Unexpected encounter in the woods—Esther Cram's grief and despair—Womanly consolation and sympathy—A strange disclosure—Sudden and fearful termination of the scene—Esther Cram seeks Mrs. Jepson again and confides to her her strange story—Family pride, ... 88

CHAPTER XI.

Hereafter—Internal conflict—The whispers of conscience—Mrs. Jepson commences her dreaded task—Nell's filial love—A transformation—John's obduracy—Nell's entrance into the village school, ... 99

CHAPTER XII.

Nell pleading for John's love—Their visit to the fortune-teller's hut—Interview between Esther Cram and John—His recollection of his wrongs—The fortune-teller's promise—John's gratitude—Dr. Jepson and Nell—The fortune-teller's review of the past—Wonderful change—Esther Cram seeks again her counselor Mrs. Jepson, ... 107

CHAPTER XIII.

Molly Lawson—The fortune-teller's visit—Signs of reformation—Molly's surprise and indignation—The first act of reparation—Grief mollified—Dreams and castle-building—John comes to the rescue—A primitive courtship—Reünion, . 118

CHAPTER XIV.

Change in the fortune-teller's occupation—Nell mystified—Miss Howard's patient, judicious teachings—Nell's first effort to reform—Good resolutions—Dr. Jepson encouraged—Conversation over the little sleeper—Doubts and fears—The doctor's ideas of charity 128

CHAPTER XV.

Six years' changes—Nellie's reverie—Walter Everson and his friend discover her seated upon the rock—Unbounded admiration and wonder—They seek the fortune-teller's hut—Interview between the young men and Esther Cram—The book of Fate, ... 139

CHAPTER XVI. PAGE

Village reminiscences—Esther Cram's superstitious fears—Domestic conference—The youthful mariner—Specific for the blues—The mountain maiden—A ludicrous mistake—The gifts—Walter Everson's jealousy—Pride of birth—Plebeian notions—Another disagreeable encounter, . . 149

CHAPTER XVII.

Nellie's enthusiasm—Dark days recalled—Nellie an unwitting teacher—Mrs. Waters' story—The young girl's heroism—A brilliant position—Sudden discovery—Nellie flees from an old friend—Walter Everson's agitation—His resolve, . 161

CHAPTER XVIII.

The schoolmates—Nellie crowned queen of hearts—Fluttering anticipations—A friend in need—Parting between teacher and pupil—A fitting *début*—The fortune-teller's prophecy recalled—Mr. Murray's admiration—"TRUTH" a noble birthright, ... 171

CHAPTER XIX.

Fraternal confidence—Family pride—Love, timid and fearful—The avowal—Nellie's reply—A brilliant *Soirée*—Nellie, queen of taste and beauty—Universal homage—Walter Everson presses his suit—Nellie's reverie in the conservatory—Sudden and cruel awakening—She avows herself, . 181

CHAPTER XX.

The effects of Nellie's disclosure—Walter Everson's horror—Mr. Murray betrays his secret—Nellie triumphs over self—Gossip—Nature's nobility—A worldly mother—Bitter altercation—Pride victorious—Midnight thoughts, . . . 191

CHAPTER XXI.

Nellie returns to her mother and home—The invalid—Sad forebodings—Esther Cram's faith—Close scrutiny—Nellie listens to a wonderful tale of her mother's life—Dr. Jepson brings an unexpected visitor—Interview between Mr. Murray and Esther Cram—Dr. Jepson's suspicions aroused—Mrs. Jepson's incredulity, ... 201

CHAPTER XXII. PAGE

Maternal love and woman's pride—Dr. Baylies' plain dealing—Irresolution—Sick-bed fancies and memories—Pride conquered and *the mother* triumphs—The nurse's remonstrance—woman's logic, ... 211

CHAPTER XXIII.

Esther Cram back to her mountain home again—Reflections—A strange visitor—Interview between Mrs. Everson and Esther Cram—Pride humbled—Tempting offer—Nellie's noble rejection of the haughty woman's suit—Honest exultation and righteous revenge, ... 221

CHAPTER XXIV.

Perplexing news—Dr. Jepson offers sympathy and aid—Mr. Murray's confession of love—Fears and hopes—True friendship—An astounding disclosure—Nellie's appreciation of true worth—The betrothal—A mother's blessing, . 231

CHAPTER XXV.

The summons—Faith triumphs over death—Dying blessings—A precious bequest—Passing away—Cares and sorrows laid to rest forever—Nellie's grief—True comfort in affliction—The mountain burial, ... 241

CHAPTER XXVI.

Mrs. Everson's return to her home—Self-communings—Woman's mission—Meeting of mother and son—Silent conflict—The just punishment of pride—Walter Everson justifies Nellie—The mother subdued at last—A glorious mission hastening to its fulfillment, ... 248

CHAPTER XXVII.

Retrospection—A wish for the future—The response—A holy pledge—The lovers over a mother's grave—Dr. Jepson's "affection of the heart"—Preparations for the wedding—John's gift—Joy and grief commingled—Nuptial benedictions—The doctor's wedding present—A burden removed—The diamond ring—Marriage in the village church—Nellie a wife—A debt of gratitude repaid—Molly's reflections thereat, ... 256

CHAPTER XXVIII.

PAGE

Commotion among the *élite*—Fashion and beauty on the *qui vive*—Maneuvering—Mr. Murray discloses his title and station to his bride—Her astonishment—True nobility of character—Nellie's resolve—Her native dignity and grace as Lady Stratherne—The *furore*—Retributive justice—Startling denouement—Nellie's hour of triumph, . . . 270

CHAPTER XXIX.

A dinner-party—Pleasant plans for the future—The parting—Dr. Jepson and his wife return to their home and duties—The sick-chamber—A painful interview—Walter Everson's frank confession—A sad and lonely man—Princely welcome to the young Lord and his bride—Nellie finds a home at last in the hearts of her husband's noble parents, . . . 283

WILD NELL,

THE

WHITE MOUNTAIN GIRL.

CHAPTER I.

"High on some cliff, to heaven up-plied,
Of rude access, of prospect wild,
Where, tangled round the jealous steep,
Strange shades o'erbrow the valleys deep,
And holy genii guard the rock,
Its glooms embrown, its springs unlock,
While on its rich ambitious head
An Eden, like his own, lies spread."

Snugly ensconced in its mountain cradle, lay the quiet little village of B——. Nurtured in Nature's lap, with her scenes of wildest sublimity surrounding them, the simple villagers knew but little of the world beyond. To their unsophisticated minds, the dizzy hights which encircled their homes, the deep wooded valley, with diverging paths scarce smoothed by travel, were clad in more beauty, filled with sweeter music, than the highest human invention could ever attain. Fashion had not then pointed her approving finger towards the "White Hills," nor given her gracious sanction to the impulse which has since sent so many to those mountain wilds.

Where, in obedience to her mandate, luxurious hotels now swarm with the gay butterflies of her own creation, once was heard but the low hum of insect life, the joyous carol of forest songsters, or the fearful howl of its wild wanderers. One vast, glorious temple of nature, with little bands of worshippers scattered here and there through the deep-sounding aisles, or clustered beneath the noble domes, were the White Mountains, ere the world rushed into that pure sanctury, and tinctured with its own spirit those who bowed to nature's God.

At the time of which we write, the fame of their unequalled scenery, of the cool, invigorating, life-restoring air which filled their little villages with a hardy race, had reached but few ears in fashionable society, and awakened no response, save the spirit of adventure in here and there a breast.

Wearied with the beaten track in which, for years, he had followed his mother and sister, and satiated with the follies that beset it, Walter Everson hailed with joy the thought of a summer exploration into those mountain wildernesses, as a bright alternative to the usual tedious season at Saratoga. Possessing a highly cultivated mind, a quick, appreciative intellect, and withal inclined to taciturnity and moodiness, the adventure promised him peculiar gratification. The consternation his sudden absence might occasion to certain designing mothers, who had been anxiously awaiting his attainment to majority and a large fortune, he smilingly imagined, as, with a brief announcement of his equestrian

trip, he left his friends to solve the mystery as best they could.

A sultry summer sun had, for successive days, poured its burning rays into every penetrable nook and dell, till the whole earth seemed parching under its stroke; yet, in the little village around which nature so lovingly threw its protecting arms, a cool, delicious breeze swept through the valley, around the mountain sides, and into every open hamlet where busy hands were plying their evening tasks. Gently it fanned the silvery locks of the humble pastor, as, in meditation deep, he bent over the sacred page, selecting therefrom precious sustenance for the souls of his beloved flock. More roughly it seized upon the folds of the weekly newspaper, with which good worthy Dr. Jepson was regaling himself in the porch of his front-door, and which, with a decided *flap*, saluted his cheek.

"Gim-i-*ni!*" he exclaimed, with a sneeze, "I'm catching cold, certain;" and drawing from his capacious pocket a red bandanna, he tied it carefully over his smooth, bald pate, and settling himself back, resumed his pleasant occupation.

Timid steps approached, but the good Doctor's thoughts were at that moment far away, roaming in the world without. Nearer they came, yet still he heeded them not; then a gentle pull at his coat-sleeve, and yet his abstraction continued; now a more violent *twitch*, accompanied with a strange ejaculation, and the Doctor is on his feet in a moment.

"Gim-i-*ni!*" he cried, gazing at the figure before him, "what devil's imp are you?"

"Mammy wants ye," was the only reply.

"Mammy! whom do *you* honor with that title?" said he, scanning more curiously the wild-looking child; "what's your name?"

"Wild Nell."

"Gim-i-*ni!* then you're the strange creature I've heard so much about—can climb a tree like a squirrel, and live on nuts, too; let's see you go up that one now."

In a moment the child was looking down exultingly from the branches above his head.

"Well, that beats all that ever I see! come down here, you witch, you wizard, or whatever you are; did you say Crazy Esther wants to see me—precious child of your mother—that you are."

"Mammy wants ye, but I hate ye," cried the child, assuming a defiant attitude, while her black eyes glistened with anger; "you called me names, you did."

"Poor child! so I did," replied the Doctor, laughing heartily; "how could I help calling such a mongrel specimen of humanity a wizard? But come now, tell me what you want, and be off with those fiery eyes of yours. Is your mammy, as you call her, sick?"

"No," replied the child, with a contemptuous toss of her head, "*she* an't never sick; some body's fell down on a horse, and she wants ye, that's all;" and, with a leap and a bound, the strange little being was hastening away.

"Here, stop, you—you—what d'ye call yourself—you Wild Nell," cried the Doctor, beckoning to her; "how am I to get my saddle-bags up to the 'Devil's Crag?'—rightly named too, for such inhabitants," he added, in a low tone.

"Give 'em to me," shortly answered the child.

"You; why, they're twice as heavy as you are. I should expect to see you riding through the air on a broomstick, with 'em dangling on behind, if I should give 'em to you. I must carry 'em myself, I s'pose; there's no riding up to that infernal place;" and, with a half-groan, the Doctor brought out the leather bags, and carefully laid them by the side of the porch, while he returned for his hat. Quick as thought, the child seized the precious deposit, and was far beyond his reach ere the Doctor was aware of her intentions.

"Gim-i-*ni!*" he exclaimed, puffing along after her, if that little sprite an't some kin to the 'old boy,' then he haint got any in this world, certain; every one o' them vials 'll be smashed, before she's done with it, and then what am I to do? that's all my stock in trade. Now, where's the little imp? Gim-i-*ni!* if she an't top o' that rock! O my saddle-bags!"

Toiling up the steep and rugged path which led to the wild spot commonly known as the "Devil's Crag," was no easy task for the portly Doctor. He had accomplished it but once before in his life, when, some years younger, he went with a party of friends to consult the genii of the mountain, through their oracle, Crazy Es-

ther Cram. He began almost to fear that this was some trick of evil spirits to entice him among them, and wondered that he had so readily followed his strange little guide, without further questioning. There was no looking back, though, for his invaluable saddle-bags must be saved from their infernal clutches; so on he pushed in nervous haste, catching now and then a glance of his property, as it swung lightly on the arm of the weird child, but always beyond the sound of his voice.

"Gim i-*ni!*" at length he exclaimed, coming to a full stop, "I don't believe I'll go a step further. I might have known it was a tom-fool's errand; just as if any body could have got up here on a horse. My old nag would have blowed before he'd gone ten rods. Just let me catch that little imp again, and I guess there won't be much flesh and bones left on her, that is, if she's made of such stuff. Gim-i-*ni!* but there *is* a horse somewhere about," he added, as a low neigh fell on his ear; "I'll find out now, certain;" and, redoubling his efforts, the good Doctor soon found himself upon an open, cleared spot, about half-way up the mountain, in the midst of which stood the cabin of the fortune-teller, Esther Cram. Near the entrance grazed a beautiful black colt, whose half-intelligent eye was often directed toward the open door, as if in expectation of some familiar greeting.

"So you've come at last," croaked a raven voice, from one of the apertures of the hut; "why didn't you turn back, man of courage! afraid of losing your miserable

nostrums, was ye? Come in, come in; none but a fool can cure a fool."

"Gim-i-*ni!*" cried the Doctor, as obeying the ungracious invitation, he stepped inside the witch's home, and surveyed the scene before him.

CHAPTER II.

"THERE, as the homeless woman sits alone,
In hollow winds she hears a spirit moan;
And there, they say, a wizard orgie crowds,
When the moon lights her watch-tower in the clouds."

THE room seemed peopled with demons, hobgoblins, and spectres of every hue and shape, so vividly had Esther Cram transcribed them upon the walls of her dwelling. From the berries and roots of the forest, she had decocted the unearthly dye with which these hideous monsters were daubed. One end of the apartment was screened from view, by a curtain covered with the trophies of her battles with animal and reptile life. Mingled with the skins of the bear, panther, wolf, and smaller animals, were the bright spots of the rattlesnake, the crawling form of the lizard, and the coil of the adder. With fantastic taste, she had looped around the curtain a fringe made of the rattles of her creeping foe, so that, when slightly moved, the whole hut seemed full of deadly reptiles. This it was which called forth the exclamation of the Doctor, as he stood inside the entrance to this frightful place. The hard, bony face, the

piercing black eyes of the crone herself, as she moved aside the curtain and beckoned him to approach, did not serve to render less hideous the demoniacal scene.

"Gim-i-*ni!*" he reïterated, rubbing his eyes with amazement, "what sort of an infernal pit have I got into now!—rattlesnakes, beasts, and devils! I don't know which is worst. Well, old beldame, what do you want of me up here, and where's my saddle-bags?"

"There's for ye," said a voice beside him, and plumping thēm down at his feet, Wild Nell hastily retreated to her usual hiding-place among the rafters, where she could watch all that was going on.

The striking resemblance between these strange inmates of this stranger abode, stamped at once their relationship, though Esther Cram's black eye twinkled with a cunning not yet grown into that of the child.

"Spry as a cat," said the Doctor, looking up after the latter, "I shouldn't think she'd got much of Job Cram's blood in her."

"Who talks of Job Cram?" cried the fortune-teller, coming forward, and shaking her long, crooked finger at him; "the name of the dead dwells not upon cowards' tongues. Come in, come in, we've work for you here."

"I'd quite as lief sit down here, if you've no objections," replied the Doctor, drawing a stool near the open door; "now, what is it you want of me? It's getting late, you see, and, ugh! I'd much rather be at my house than here this time o' night; so say on, quick."

Esther Cram drew herself up to her full height, her arms a-kimbo, her eyes sparkling wildly, and an expression of the most supreme contempt was about to fall from her lips, when a deep, prolonged groan arrested her words, and brought the Doctor to his feet.

"Gim-i-*ni!*" he cried, gazing at the horrid images around, "which of 'em did that?"

"Fool! dotard! coward! follow me," cried the hag, hastening behind the reptile screen.

With a shudder the Doctor plunged after her. "It's a gone case with me," said he, "but there's no helping it now. May be I've something in my saddle-bags that'll cure rattlesnakes' bites,"

"Gim-i-*ni!* what's all this, Esther Cram," he cried, forgetting his fright as he looked around.

It was a small apartment—just large enough to admit a cross bedstead, a low table, and a stool. All traces of her supernatural calling had been carefully removed by Esther Cram, when she laid the insensible form of a wounded man upon that bed. She had found him but a few rods from her hut, lying on the ground, the blood oozing forth from a fearful-looking wound in his temple. All her skill in roots and herbs had been exhausted in fruitless efforts to restore him; incantations had been repeated in vain; still he lay, unconscious of the strange hands into which he had fallen. Then the really anxious woman bethought herself of the village doctor, and dispatched her child, as we have seen, for his aid.

"There," she exclaimed, pointing to the bed, "to

your work, and I to mine," and, turning, she raised the curtain with no gentle hand.

"Ugh! old witch," cried the Doctor, calling after her, "tell me first where you keep those rattlesnakes."

"Where you have laid many a one," she answered sharply, shaking the fringe before her; "rattling in their graves."

Another deep groan from the sufferer recalled the Doctor's attention to his patient, and caused the woman to drop the curtain quickly.

"Gim-i-*ni!* the poor fellow's in a bad case, certain; pulse low—ugly-looking gash there, and internally injured, no one knows how much; up here too, in the midst of all sorts of varmints; ugh! I wouldn't give two pins for his chance of life," muttered the Doctor in a low voice, as he proceeded to a careful examination of the wounded man; "I'll try a little blood-letting first; that generally brings a man to his senses quickest of any thing. I should think he must have been out of them, though, when he ventured a horseback ride to the 'Devil's Crag.' Look here, Esther Cram"—he spoke in a louder tone—"stop that croaking out there, and bring me a bowl and some bandages, if you've got any thing but snake-skins to make 'em of."

"King of hearts! ace of clubs! he'll do," muttered the fortune-teller, placing the desired articles before the doctor; "if his heart be true as his form is fair, his love were a prize for a queen to wear; he'll do, never mind."

"He'll be done *for*, pretty soon, I reckon, if you don't

stop that palaver and help me," replied the Doctor, impatiently.

With a zeal which betrayed more of a woman's heart than seemed possible to exist beneath such an uncouth exterior, Esther Cram seconded the Doctor's efforts, until they were rewarded by signs of slowly returning consciousness. Languidly the heavy eyes unclosed, and rested for a moment on the broad, benevolent face, bent with such kindly interest over him; then, with a shudder, the young man closed them again, and sighed deeply.

"That's a good sign," exclaimed the Doctor, encouragingly, "just swallow this, my young friend, and you'll soon be better."

Without opening his eyes again, the young man obeyed mechanically, and drained the last drop of the composing draught held to his lips.

"There," said the Doctor, "that'll keep him quiet to-night, and I guess it's the best thing I could do for him. Now, hark'ee, old lady, I've something for your ear, but it mustn't be spoken in his hearing. You've just got to shut up all your infernal noises," he added, as they retreated to the door of the hut, "stop all your witch capers to-night, and watch like a civilized woman over him; don't let him wake up with that horrid rattling in his ears, and think the devil's got him before his time; ugh! I pity the poor fellow when he does wake, though;" and the doctor glanced around the walls with an ague shake, as the deepening gloom seemed to awake their spectre life; then, throwing his precious bags across his

shoulders, he hastened away before Esther Cram could reply.

Midnight, deep and dark, hung on the mountain; no sound, save the wild braying of the ravenous wolf, as he scents his nightly prey, or the shrill cry, half-human, with which the hungry bear lures on his victims, broke the stillness of that vast solitude. Eternal night seemed written on nature's brow—heaven's black signet affixed to her dark destiny. To Esther Cram, in her lone mountain hut, nature, thus enshrouded, had a peculiar charm. She caught the night-wind's sigh, as through the forest its soft echoes swept, and, like sweetest music, its wild wailing fell on her ear. Voices of familiar kindred seemed whispering to her soul, as, from out of the darkness, low, fitful moans crept around her dwelling. Then it was that her excited imagination found vent in wild responses, and filled the midnight air with fanciful, incoherent ravings. But a spell came over her spirit—a strange, unwonted mood, as, in that night of darkness, she watched around the bed of the stranger youth. Early days, with their thronging memories, came back upon her, till she, whose name had spread far and wide as Satan's favorite emissary—as the connecting link between the infernal and our fair dwelling world; she, the witch, the wizard, felt the soft tear-drops trickling down her withered cheeks. Many, many years, since that sealed fountain had been thus opened—not even when her husband lay a crushed and shapeless mass before her; not when, with almost superhuman strength,

she rescued her first-born, her idol, from the jaws of the maddened wolf, and brought him, a stiffened corpse, into her hut. Agony, tearless and soul-withering, had been hers. Little wot those who spurned her as some noxious beast, or sought her abode only that through her mystic lore, futurity might be unvailed to them, that within the hardened, sinewy frame before them, once beat a heart as free and joyous as their own. Little, too, could any one have recognized "Crazy Esther," as she was familiarly known throughout the mountains, in the bowed form of that solitary watcher. By the dim light of the little taper in her hand, she had gazed upon the sleeping face of one, rescued by her from a terrible death; long and searching was her scrutiny—then to the hidden corner, where, in the sweet sleep of innocence, lay her only, her last treasure.

"I see it all," she muttered at length, extinguishing the tiny light, and throwing herself upon the floor, rocking to and fro in her violent agitation, "I see it all; the serpent will sting the bosom that warms it; the bird will go from its nest, and flutter in its gilded cage, till, with broken wings and drooping head, it seek again its mountain eyrie. Alack! alack! woe, woe is me! but fate must be obeyed."

CHAPTER III.

"FLEETLY climbs she to the verge
Of the naked craggy steep,
O'er the tempest-riven gorge
Boundeth she with fearless leap;
O'er the chasm's fearful brink
Hangs she, on the topmost hight,
Where the crags abruptly sink,
And the path is lost to sight."

SUNRISE upon the mountains! what artist can paint the glorious scene! what pen, uninspired, trace its infinite sublimity! Type of that illustrious morn, whose first beams shall awake a sleeping world, and whose light shall be the glory of the Lord, what eye can dwell unmoved upon its majestic approach? Gathering up the folds of her misty mantle from the white-capped hills, night softly withdraws beneath the gossamer vail; gentle her retreat, quiet her abdication to the lordly king, whose triumphant reign, as on he rolls in his golden chariot, is proclaimed in sweetly echoing strains from hill to hill, through valley, grove, and glade, till the whole earth swells forth in one loud anthem of praise.

Sunrise upon the mountains! Who, that hath ever caught the first amber ray sparkling among the dew-

drops, ever listened to the first note of welcome warbled forth, or watched the varying tints, as from softest shade to bright effulgence they grew; who, that hath ever stood upon one of these pinnacles, and witnessed the glorious bursting forth of day, but has felt his heart stirred by the invisible presence of Him, at whose command the first created morn awoke—at whose simple words, "Let there be light," a whole creation of beauty sprang into life.

The wild, uncouth mountain girl gazed, alone, as was her wont, upon that scene of solitary grandeur. Bending forward, with eager, straining eye, and hushed breath, she caught the first flash as it sparkled among the tree-tops; then, joyfully clapping her hands, forth gushed her soul in melody, so sweet, so rapturous, heaven's feathered choir might well prolong the inspiring theme. In that great, glorious temple had Wild Nell been educated—nature her teacher, guide, and companion. The forest bird winged not a more joyous way, than did this simple mountain child, as from earliest dawn to evening's shade she carolled lightly through the woods. Rude though she was, ignorant as the dumb companions of her rambles in all pertaining to worldly knowledge, she had yet imbibed at a fountain, whose fertilizing streams, as on they flow, shall clothe with verdure bright the barren soil. What hand shall pluck the noxious weeds from this fair garden, ere yet their tangled roots choke fruit and flower?

Her first joyful greeting to the new day over, Wild

Nell still sat upon the rock, whose summit she had chosen for her post of observation, that morning. The scenes of the past day were vividly before her. Breaking, as they did, upon the wild monotony of her existence, it was not strange that they aroused new and peculiar feelings in her breast.

"Come, Lolo," said she, as a beautiful squirrel skipped over the rock where she sat, "come, I'm goin' to tell ye somethin'. There," she added, smoothing its plump, glossy sides, as it jumped into her lap, "I don't hate you, but *he* called me names, and I'll throw stones at him, I will. I like t'other one, though; I'm glad I scared his horse; mammy says 'twon't kill him; les go down and see him, Lolo; I shan't play long o' you today;" and, perching her favorite on her shoulder, Wild Nell lightly sprang from rock to rock in her quick descent.

"Gim-i-*ni!* if that an't a picture worth coming clear up here to see," cried the good Doctor, pointing upwards, as he stopped to rest upon the grassy plat before Esther Cram's door.

"She'll do, she'll do," muttered the fortune-teller, with a glance of motherly pride at the swiftly descending figure of her child; "the young eagle may soar awhile, but its flight shall be staid, its wings pinioned, till to the earth it sinks, beside its tame and spiritless mate, the dove. Ah me! ah me!"

"Here she comes," shouted the Doctor, unheeding the woman's words, in the intense earnestness with

which he watched Wild Nell's approach; "gim-i-*ni!* that little witch an't made of bones, certain; she never could have done that if she was."

Bounding like a fawn, her black hair streaming in the wind, her eyes wild with the excitement of her race with her nimble favorite, Wild Nell was at her mother's side, ere she became aware of the Doctor's presence. Springing back, she cast upon him a look of hatred and defiance, strangely at variance with the bright, beautiful smile playing upon her face but a moment before.

"What's all that for?" said he, laughing; "do you take me for an ogre? I shan't eat *you*, you may depend on't; I an't so fond of cub's meat as that. But come, old lady, we mustn't neglect our patient for this little wild cat. How is he this morning?" and the Doctor half-reluctantly prepared to enter the hut.

"Night battles and morning wins; whose shall be the honor? Come in, come in; drugs and poisons make fit crowns for such as you."

"Now, look here, Esther Cram," said the Doctor, stepping back and speaking in a low voice, "I wish you'd just stop all that jabbering nonsense, and talk to me in plain English. Has the fellow come to his senses yet?"

"Yes," she replied shortly.

"At what time?"

"When the sun's eye fell upon him."

"Pooh," exclaimed the Doctor impatiently, as he went in, "*your* evil eye, more likely; that's about equal to a

flash of lightning, to bring any body to. Poor fellow, I wonder who he is."

"One who is thankful to hear again the kindly tones of a human voice," said the young man, speaking with much effort, as the Doctor stood beside his bed.

"No wonder, no wonder, my friend," replied the Doctor, smiling significantly; "you thought you'd got beyond the reach of *human* aid, here, didn't you? More'n half right, if you did, certain."

"Length of days, full of praise; drugs and poisons 'll do the work; never fear," cried Esther Cram, putting her head in through the opening she had made by fastening up one side of the curtain.

"Gim-i-*ni!* that woman's enough to drive one's wits out of 'em," exclaimed the Doctor petulantly; "I hope you've got strong nerves, sir."

"Not very, just now, I fear," the young man replied faintly; "there's too much distress here," touching his forehead.

"That's just what I feared," said the Doctor, taking his pulse; "your head must be severely injured."

"I fear it is," replied the other, "though I am but just becoming conscious of its being injured at all."

"That's because you haven't come to your feelings yet; what a pity we can't get you down among civilized folks, to take care of you; but it's no use, you can't be moved now, certain; you must keep perfectly quiet. Esther Cram *can* be a good nurse, if she'll stop her croaking and attend to you; there, there, I wouldn't

try to talk any more; I see it hurts you, Mr. —— Mr. ——," the Doctor hesitated.

"Everson—Walter Everson," said the sick man, turning his head, with a groan. "O dear! where am I? Whoa, Bess—gently—whoa, I say."

"That's always the way," said the Doctor, in a low voice, to himself; "brain-fevers most always set in so; poor fellow, it 'll go hard with him, if that's it; what a pity I didn't find out something about his folks. But we've no time to lose. Here, Esther Cram," he continued, going to the other part of the hut, "you've got plenty of business on your hands now. This stranger's going to have the brain-fever, I'm afraid. He says his name is Everson; but it's no matter who or what he is; we've got to work hard to cure him up. Now, come in here, and I'll show you what to do for him when I'm gone."

"Charmed lives need no poisoned food," muttered the woman, following him.

"If there is any portion of a woman's heart left within you, Esther Cram," said the Doctor earnestly, "I beg of you to use it now. Here is the life of a fellow-being, depending, perhaps, upon your care. Will you let him die, or will you put forth every effort to save him? Answer me that."

"Give your directions," she merely replied, pointing to the medicines.

From her retreat, where she had been watching, with intense interest, the whole scene, Wild Nell softly crept,

as the Doctor's retreating footsteps died away in the distance. "I'll do it, mammy," she exclaimed, suddenly standing before her mother.

"Do what, child?" the woman asked sharply.

"What *he* said," Wild Nell replied, pointing to the spot where the Doctor had stood a moment before.

Esther Cram bent her keen eye upon the little face before her; then, with an impulse almost fierce, from its intensity, she caught the child to her breast, exclaiming: "The lamb may wander from its warm fold, but the mother's heart will follow. Nell—Nell—'tis my all. There, go," she suddenly added, with a changed tone, putting the child from her; "fools are plenty enough without Esther Cram's becoming one. Go to your plays; this is no place for you. See Lolo; there she runs."

For a moment Wild Nell stood, bewildered by the strangeness of every thing about her. From the bed, upon which, since her remembrance, no head had ever rested, save her mother's and her own, came the low moans and wild ejaculations of the stranger; one, too, whom her conscience told her she had helped to place there—the Doctor's words still ringing in her ear, and, above all, her mother's unwonted humor—all combined to add to the child's wonder. Never, in her after-life, were the impressions of that moment effaced—never could that morning be forgotten, whose first rays of light penetrated the dark mind of the mountain child.

"Here, Lolo," she cried, rushing out after her pet, "les run; I don't like to stay in there; it hurts me."

Up the rocks, through the thicket, now perching upon the topmost branches of a tree, then dashing through the sparkling waterfall, gleefully frolicked the child and her mute companion. Still, Wild Nell could not chase away the thoughts which so oppressed her.

"Come up here, Lolo," said she, gaining, at length, a dizzy hight, from which nature stretched forth in infinite beauty; "I like this best, it don't hurt me so."

Simple, untaught being! as on that cliff she sits, the vast, untried world spread out beneath her gaze, comes there no whispering from the far distant future—breathes there no sigh for those days of happy ignorance, when, unknowing and unknown, her childish heart found full enjoyment in nature's worship? Thoughtless and free as the agile creature beside her, whose hand shall forge the first link in that invisible chain which binds to earth—whose finger point to the first lessons in the great unlearned Book of Life?

CHAPTER IV.

"Gone is Friendship's friendliness,
After Love's fidelity;
Gone is Honor in the mess,
Spat upon by Charity;
Faith has fled distress.

Those grim tipstaves at the gate,
Freely may their work begin;
Let them in! they shall not wait.
There is little now within
Left for scorn and hate."

"Everson," repeated the fortune-teller to herself without moving from the spot where her child had left her, "is it from Arthur's grave I hear a voice crying: 'Esther, look upon my son'? Is there no den, no cave on earth, to which the dead find not entrance? Must the bud too be blighted? O Arthur! for you I became what I am; to save you I fled from all human companionship. When your proud mother scorned me, her servant, because I awakened, as she said, low-born thoughts within you, did I not place a barrier heaven-high between us by wedding the ignorant but kind woodsman? What fate has led hither

another of that dreaded name? I could almost find it in my heart to — no! no! he may be Arthur's child! I saw him once in my dreams, and his face was like this fair youth's. Shall the young eagle's talons clutch his prey from *my* breast? No! by all the powers of darkness I'll save her yet; I'll laugh to scorn the tempter's wiles; I'll turn aside fate's stern decree; heaven and earth will I move ere my child's heart be withered and blasted as mine has been. Better lie down beside the crawling worm, with no pillow but the green sod — better find a home in the den of some howling wolf, than trust the world's deceitful smile. Ha! who knows better than I?—I, who have herded with wild beasts these twenty years, who am almost like them in form and feature! Sooner would I lay Nell in the paws of a half-starved bear than let her forth into that world. No; though I read what fate has written, some power must be invoked to change her doom."

Down into a deep, hoarse whisper sank the woman's voice as, prostrating herself, she threw her arms wildly forth, crying:

"Ye spirits who encompass earth around, who in these mountains make your haunts, I seek your aid; this night in yonder cave I'll join your revels. Fail not to meet me there."

Her words died away in silence, yet still she lay in that imploring attitude. Suddenly the shrill song of a cricket burst forth near her, and she arose with a smile

of triumph, as though, in that sharp sound, the wished-for response had met her ear.

"I knew I should not call in vain," she muttered, with a low laugh, nodding her head significantly the while. "Esther Cram has not spent the flower of her life in these wild regions for naught. Ha! ha! we'll see who wins."

"What are you back again for?" she asked sharply, turning to little Nell, who had just then crept softly in at the door.

"What is it, mammy?" asked the child, looking up with a strange expression upon her little wild face. "Something hurts me here—way in," and she laid her hand upon her breast.

The mother saw with anguish the faint rippling on the dark, still surface of her child's mind. It gave a harsh tone to her voice as she quickly replied:

"Be off with your nonsense. Get some mint and eat it; that'll cure you."

"No 'twon't, 'cause I jest eat some," said Nell, with innocent earnestness. "What is it, mammy?"

"It's an evil spirit trying to get hold of you, Nell. You'd better keep out of here, or it'll have you sure," her mother replied, pushing her hastily towards the door.

"I an't afraid," cried Nell, with flashing eyes; "I'm goin' to stay here now a-purpose to see if 'twill."

"Go, I say," her mother almost fiercely exclaimed,

as the incoherent muttering of the sick man reached their ears; "I must see to him."

Nell obeyed; but as her mother disappeared behind the curtain, she crept softly back and up to her rude watching-place.

"Don't cry so, mother," muttered the unconscious sufferer, resting his wild gaze upon the hard face bent over him; "it was my own folly; I ventured too far into the woods. Whoa, Bess; careful, careful, 'tis a dangerous spot. O heavens! what's that?" and he would have leaped from the bed had not a strong arm laid him gently back. "Is that you, Cicely?" he continued, turning his head towards some imaginary object. "I've had a horrid dream; I thought I'd got among the evil spirits; but that wouldn't be as bad as to yield to your wishes. I tell you I can't marry that girl. I don't love her."

Esther Cram's whole frame shook violently as, with an appealing glance, he caught her arm:

"*You'll* save me, won't you? Don't let 'em bury me in that gold coffin. Gold, gold is all they care for; but you'll save me, won't you?"

She had met that same agonizing look many, many years before, and fled from it. There was no fleeing now. She forgot herself, she forgot every thing as, throwing her strong arms around him with almost maternal tenderness, she sobbed forth:

"Arthur's son shall be to me as my own."

What thought the little watcher who was gazing with dilated eyes and parted lips upon this scene? What wild tumult raged within that heaving breast? Nell had awakened to life within the last few hours. Its great mystery had begun to unfold before her; she had been painfully oppressed by the vague conceptions which floated at will through her chaotic mind. How eagerly, then, did she watch every word, look, and tone of those before her! how did her impetuous blood bound, her brain whirl, as she saw her mother, cold and stern to all but her, bend so tenderly over the stranger upon her bed. Nell was bewildered, overcome; her head grew dizzy, her eyes dim, till suddenly all sight, all sound ceased.

"Lost! lost!" shrieked the fortune-teller, as the insensible little form of her child fell from its hiding-place down near her feet; "all is lost now. Nell! Nell! I would have saved you had my soul been the price of your deliverance. But now, alas! alas!"

The buoyant spirit was but for a moment overthrown. Ere her mother could lay her upon her little bed in the corner whither she so tenderly bore her, Nell's eyes opened and fixed themselves, with a wondering look, upon that wrinkled face. Never did Esther Cram experience a moment like this; no arraignment at a criminal bar could have so shaken her heart as did that simple, inquiring gaze. She knew then that the spirit within her had awaked—awaked never more to slumber; that hers must now be the task she had vainly hoped *ever* to shun.

"There!" she exclaimed, concealing her emotion beneath an angry frown as she dashed some cold water into Nell's face, "see what you've got by not minding me. Next time, you'd better be off when I tell you."

"Oh—h—h!" screamed Nell, attempting to rise and falling back with an expression of intense pain on her face, "Oh! my foot!"

"Poor child, you've sprained it," said her mother in a softened tone, taking the little swollen member in her hand; "there, be still, and I'll get something to cure it."

In truth, the perplexed woman was not sorry for this diversion; though it brought present bodily pain to her child, it might save her from years of suffering, for Esther Cram had faith in the interposition of the spirits she had invoked.

"'Tan't so bad, after all," she congratulated herself while preparing some bruised herbs in which to bind the wounded foot. "It'll keep her still awhile, and—well, we shall see to-night. There, he is raving again," she added, as the young man's voice reached her ear; "I must go and calm him, though every tone and glance brings Arthur before me. Ha! who'd think such a soft heart lived within this wizen form? It didn't till Arthur's image awoke it. O Nell! for your sake it shall be hardened again—hard as adamant and immovable."

Torn with conflicting emotions — now bending, with tearful eye, over the newly-opened grave of her early

joys, then yearning, with an intensity a mother's heart alone can know, over the untrod future of her child—Esther Cram passed the long hours of that day, and still, as the lengthening shadows crept around her hut, the conflict raged within her breast.

Out upon the mountain, if you would see the sun sink to his glorious rest! Up, up, to its highest pinnacle, would you behold the royal couch on which he reposes. Piles of fleecy down, draperied in celestial tints, receive his kingly form, while heaven's gem-lit azure canopy, at his nod, drops its soft, dreamy folds around him, and night, in sombre garb, resumes her silent watch. Many such scenes of splendor had the fortune-teller witnessed; many lingering hours had she bent her earnest gaze upwards, as if to pierce through the black vail into the world beyond. What wonder if, from out the dark void, familiar voices seemed to whisper in her ear! What wonder that, in her solitude and isolation, she claimed kindred with these spirits of darkness.

The gloom of another night had fallen upon the mountain dwellers; but to him who tossed unconsciously upon his fevered bed, darkness and light were alike unnoticed; and to the little being whose sobs were hushed by kindly nature, and over whose sweet sleep some angel kept its guard, night and gloom were things unknown. Yet one there was who felt its inspiration — to whom no noon-day sun could bring

such light. Witch or wizard, embodied spirit of any name, seemed well applied to the gaunt form which moved with quick and noiseless tread around the darkened hut.

"Sleep! sleep!" she muttered, as soft and gentle breathings fell on her ear; "ye know not what it is to wake. Would that *I*, too, could drown all memory in one long, dreamless sleep. Why have I waked? why does the ghost of former years rise up and mock me now? Avaunt! ye specter of the dead; ye clothe yourself in Arthur's image to despoil me of my child! I know your wiles. Be gone! I fear you not! In yonder cave I'll rob you of your power."

With wildly flashing eyes, from which all *human* thought and feeling seemed banished, Esther Cram passed through the door of her hut, and closing it carefully behind her, disappeared in the darkness and night.

CHAPTER V.

"Or has the shock, so harshly given,
Confused me like the unhappy bark
That strikes by night a craggy shelf,
And staggers blindly ere she sink?
And stunned me from my power to think,
And all my knowledge of myself?
And made me that delirious man
Whose fancy fuses old and new
And flashes into false and true,
And mingles all without a plan?"

"Gim-i-*ni!* if I an't glad to see that look about your eye, my friend; you've had a hard battle of it, certain; but it's all coming out right; I can see that as plain as daylight;" and the good Doctor rubbed his hands with a real hearty delight, while the patient gazed upon him in surprise.

"Who are you?" at length he faintly whispered.

"Who am I! why, my name is Adoniram Jepson; saddle-bags and I are pretty well known around these parts, I reckon."

A quick, intelligent smile passed over the sick man's face, as the Doctor proudly displayed the insignia of his profession.

"That's right, you're coming to, fast; I like such smiles as that," said the Doctor encouragingly; "but you must keep very still; you mustn't exert yourself any."

"Tell me what has happened, and why I am in such a place," the young man whispered, looking around.

"Well, to make a long story short, and to keep your mind from worrying, and asking all sorts of questions, I'll tell you about it," said the Doctor. "But you must take these drops first; there, now lie still and hear me. About three weeks ago, these folks, that is, the old woman and her gal, found you lying flat in one of the paths, your head against a sharp rock, and the blood running from an ugly-looking cut in your temple. Lucky for you they found you as they did; you couldn't have stood it much longer; as it is, you've had a pretty hard fight of it."

"Did you say *three weeks?* have I been here so long?" asked his astonished listener.

"Yes, three weeks and one day, just; now don't ask any more questions, if you can help it; I'm afraid your fever'll come on again."

"Where's Bess?"

"If you mean that black colt of yours, she's safe and sound in my barn—splendid creature, too," added the Doctor.

"How strange it all seems! — like some terrible dream," murmured the sick man; "I have a faint remembrance of guiding Bess down a steep pass, when,

just before she cleared it, a hideous object, with great glaring eyes, and just ready to spring upon me, caught my gaze. What has happened since then is all a blank to me; O dear! how dreadful!" and he closed his eyes with a shudder.

"Come, come, this won't do; it'll put you all back again, and then I won't answer for consequences. You mustn't pore over such things; think of something pleasanter—your folks at home for instance."

The young man opened his eyes eagerly, as the Doctor said this, and was about to reply, when, with a shriek, he sprang up, pointing towards the rafters.

"There it is again!" he cried, "the very same!"

"Eh! what?—where?" exclaimed the Doctor, jumping from his chair and looking up; "pooh! that's nothing but the little gal; your brain's getting wrong again, certain. Come down here, you little tree-toad; it's enough to scare any body to see your great black eyes staring so over them rafters; come down here, I say; nobody'll hurt you."

A few weeks before, Nell would have flashed those "great black eyes" upon him in contemptuous anger at such a command, but now she came timidly down, and stood by his side, looking with confidence into the kind, genial face of the Doctor.

"I tell you it is the very same," cried the sick man, excitedly; "only more *humanized* now; what, and who is she?"

"She! why she's a—well—she's Esther Cram's child."

"Who is Esther Cram?"

"Look here, now, my friend, you must not keep running on so with your questions; when you're better I'll tell you all you want to know, but you never will be better if you don't keep quiet."

"I can not rest till you explain that mystery"—the young man pointed to Nell as he spoke, who stood trembling, though but half-comprehending his words.

"She's no mystery," said the Doctor, smoothing her hair; "she an't so bad as she looks, poor thing; I've found that out since she hurt her foot; we've got to be pretty good friends, haven't we, Nell?"

"Oh! dear! you don't understand me," the other exclaimed, with a nervous impatience that made the Doctor fear for his reason; "that's the same object that gave me such a fright; *what* is she?" The look of repugnance which accompanied these words made the poor child shrink behind the Doctor.

"Eh! you don't say so!" cried he, smiling, as a gleam of the truth flashed upon him; "well, it wouldn't be a bit surprising if she was; she's always hopping about up in the trees. What kind of an animal did you think it was?" he added, unable to restrain a hearty laugh at his patient's expense.

"I had not time to conjecture before my horse threw me," replied the other, "but surely nothing *human* could have looked so hideous."

"I guess we won't talk any more about it," said the Doctor, who saw Nell's bosom heaving with emotion

she might not long suppress; "now your mystery's cleared up, you must rest. Come, Nell, we'll go into the other room, and see about your foot;" and he kindly drew the child away.

"What is it?" she asked, looking up in her earnest way; "does he hate me?"

"Ha! ha! what a sensitive chick you are," replied the Doctor, patting her head.

"Say, does *he* hate me?" she urged, pointing towards the inner apartment.

"Well, he don't love you over and above much, I guess. So *you* frightened his horse, did you, eh?" the Doctor's smile encouraged the child, who frankly replied:

"Yes, but I didn't mean to; I wish he wouldn't hate me, though."

"'Tan't any matter whether he hates you or not; what do you care about it?" said the Doctor, as he finished his examination of her sprained foot; "there, I guess you'll be running about the mountain again in a day or two."

But she did care—this little isolated being, to whom a new era had dawned; she did care whether he, whose coming had wrought such a change in every thing about her, would look upon her with kindness or aversion. All too rare was the pleasant tone, the smile of affection, not to be eagerly sought by her craving heart. And yet, as, day after day, her stealthy steps glided

around the form of the convalescent, the haunting remembrance of that expression of loathing and disgust, with which he first looked upon her, made her instinctively shrink from again encountering his gaze. But at length her earnest longing could no longer be resisted, and one day, as, wearied with the discomfort of his situation, Walter Everson threw his head back with a sigh, she suddenly stood beside him, with the artless inquiry, tremblingly uttered:

"Do you hate me now?"

With a start of surprise, the young man involuntarily pushed the child from him, exclaiming:

"Hate you! nature does, it seems, and why shouldn't I?" then, seeing the expression of intense distress which his manner, more than his words, had brought to her face, he added, in a more kindly tone, "poor creature, you are not to blame for nature's neglect; no, I do not hate you."

A flash of joy, playing an instant over her features, then concentrating in the dark eye raised to him, was her only reply.

"Why! how that smile has transformed you!" he exclaimed with interest; "I'm not sure but you are worth studying, especially as I have nothing else to do. Now, tell me, what did you ask me that question for? why should you think I hate you?"

"'Cause every body does—only mammy and the Doctor," Nell answered timidly.

"Whom do you mean by every body?" Walter asked with a smile, which unconsciously drew the child near him.

"Oh! all the folks down under," she replied, earnestly; "they call me names, and the boys run after me and throw stones at me. Oh! I mean to kill 'em when I'm bigger;" her eyes grew fierce with hatred as she spoke.

"Hush! hush! Nell; it's wicked to talk so," Walter exclaimed sternly; "nobody will like you if you do."

"Will *you* like me if I won't talk so any more?"

Walter Everson could not resist the imploring look with which these words were uttered.

"Yes, I will," said he, taking her little brown hand in his; "I *do* like you now, and if you would comb that black hair out smoothly, wash your face and hands clean, and get your mother to put on a nice clean apron, I think I should like you very much better. I'm not sure but you'd make a decent-looking girl, after all."

Wild Nell did not fully comprehend all he said, but those blessed words, "I do like you now," echoed and reëchoed with every tumultuous throb of her glad heart.

Walter Everson was more and more interested in the strange child. Beneath her uncouth garb, her tangled locks, and soiled skin, he could detect gleams of the spirit within, and though a lover of *caste*, a believer in the social distinctions of wealth, he was half-inclined to adopt her at once, as his *protégé*. With this thought came another, which caused his merry laugh to ring through the hut. He imagined the look of horror with

which his aristocratic mother and polished sister would greet the wild, untamed being, should he introduce her to his home circle.

"It would be capital sport," he cried aloud, forgetting the presence of the child, who had shrunk back into a corner out sight.

"Laughter may lead the van, but lamentation and sorrow shall quickly follow," muttered Esther Cram, whose ear caught the sound of his mirth, just as she was entering the hut.

"What's that you said, my good woman?" asked Walter, beckoning her towards him.

"Leave folly to fools, but be *thou* wise," she replied, fixing her piercing eye upon him.

"Why should I be wiser than others?" he asked.

"Why should the son of a king be more honored than a slave?" she replied with a peculiar look; "there's noble blood in your veins, young man."

"Stay," he cried, as she turned to go; "there seems to be some hidden meaning in many things you have said to me; why will you not explain them? Come, I shall soon be away—in a few days, at farthest, I shall be able to go, and you may never see me again. Will you not gratify my curiosity?"

"What would you ask of me?" she replied.

"You have dropped many mysterious hints about the past and the future. I would have you explain them, or, in other words, treat me professionally, and tell my fortune. Here, let me cross your hands with silver to make it sure." Walter drew a bright bit from his

pocket, and dropped it into the hard open palm of her hand.

"Silver from *you!*—from Ar—" she checked herself and stood a moment in silence—"Yes, I'll take it—it shall go into the earth with me, and then he'll know—"

"Come, now for my fortune," said Walter, interrupting her with a playful air; "mind you give me a good one."

Esther Cram arose without a word and shut out every glimmer of light from the apartment; then, removing the covering with which she had dexterously hid the walls of her hut, she cried in a low, sepulchral tone: "Mortal! wouldst thou behold the past, or from futurity alone withdraw the vail?"

So sudden had been her movements, Walter was taken by surprise; he had not the slightest belief in fortune-telling, second-sight, or any of the supernatural agencies, which were at that time so popularly received; therefore he replied, in a light tone:

"Past and future are alike hid from mortals; but not to spoil the joke, suppose we look back a little, and see what you can tell me."

Suddenly a blue flame shot up before him, revealing in its lurid gleam the hideous shadows, which seemed to dance around in demoniacal glee. The tall form of the fortune-teller, too, seemed, in that fitful glare, to dilate into gigantic proportions; her eyes flashed wildly, her hair streamed in black masses down her shoulders, and from her lips issued strange, unearthly sounds.

"Woman! what incarnate fiend are you?" cried Walter, starting from his seat with amazement.

Without heeding his words, the fortune-teller placed a large clear crystal by him, and with her wand tapped it thrice, saying, as she did so:

"First from thy heart drive all hell-born thoughts—then look and learn."

With a kind of fascination, Walter leaned forward, and gazed upon the smooth, glassy surface.

"Good heavens! what do I see!" at length he almost gasped.

"*The past*," whispered the woman significantly, drawing her hand over the glass.

"Oh! do not dispel the illusion so quickly," he cried earnestly; "let me look upon it once more. Wonderful! wonderful!"

"'Tis gone, and may not be recalled," she replied; "yet once again it is permitted thee to behold a vision—shall it be of the past or future?"

"First assure me that I am awake, and not the victim of some horrid nightmare," said he, rubbing his eyes.

"You sleep, and are yet awake; you dream, and yet dream not; look."

It needed no second bidding; long and earnestly Walter gazed into the crystal.

"This, then, is ——"

"*Your future!*" the sibyl pronounced emphatically, and instantly they were in darkness again.

CHAPTER VI.

"But my being is confused with new experience,
And changed to something other than it was;
And the future with the past is set at variance."

"One needs just such a rough experience as mine, to know how to appreciate a home like this," Walter Everson exclaimed, throwing himself upon a luxurious sofa near his mother and sister.

"Your experience has been almost too rough, judging from your pale looks," the former replied anxiously.

"Come, brother mine, not a word have you told me, yet, of your romantic adventures among the mountains, though I am sure you must have a budget full of them," his sister added playfully, "only that shocking accident which has left such an ugly scar on your temple."

"Unluckily, I have nothing to tell which you young ladies would call romantic," Walter replied, laughing; "there was not even a beautiful mountain maid or wood-nymph to fall in love with."

"Just as if *we*, 'young ladies,' call nothing romantic but falling in love!" was Cicely Everson's pouting an-

swer; "I, for one, sir, would have you know that I consider it any thing but romantic."

"Take care! take care, Cicely!" Walter laughed heartily. "There's a tell-tale blush creeping into your cheek, which speaks louder than words. No romance, is there, in moonlight walks through shady groves, with a gay, handsome young officer at your side, breathing low, soft words for your ear alone?—no romance, in suddenly finding the heart you thought so free throbbing in a captive cell, and he your jailer, eh?"

"Walter! Walter! you are too bad," cried Cicely, crimsoning still more deeply.

"Forgive me, Cicy dear; I was only trying to convince you of your mistake, that was all."

"The mountain air seems to have raised your spirits, if it produced no other effect," Mrs. Everson remarked, with a smile; "you were not usually so lively, Walter."

"That is true, mother; it is the contrast, I believe, between my own beautiful home, my elegant, refined mother and sister, and the miserable den in which I lay for weeks, inhabited by two semi-barbarians, that elates me."

"Yet they attended to you carefully and kindly, you say."

"Oh! yes; the old woman could not have been more tender if I were her own child; for some reason she seemed to take a great fancy to me."

"She probably thought she would lose nothing by taking good care of you; I hope you paid her well for her services."

"I tried to, but she would not accept any thing from me, only one silver sixpence with which I crossed her hand to tell my fortune. Wasn't that strange?"

"She was a fortune-teller, then," cried Cicely, with interest; "what did she tell you?"

"Nothing worthy of being repeated, of course," interrupted Mrs. Everson; "Walter no doubt thought it best to gratify her in her own way, but what she said can be of no possible consequence."

Walter made no reply, and his mother continued:

"I am sorry the woman declined a remuneration for her trouble; it places one in an awkward position to be under obligation to such creatures."

"So I felt," said Walter, "and therefore I secretly placed a sum of money in the good physician's hands, to be expended in the education of her poor neglected child."

"A matter of rather doubtful expediency, to say the least," Mrs. Everson added; "to people in their condition, a 'little learning' proves often 'a dangerous thing.'"

"What little she'll get can not hurt her," said Walter laughing; "she was the worst-looking specimen of humanity I ever saw, though before I left I perceived a decided improvement in her. She may grow up to make some of those New-Hampshire farmers a good buxom wife yet—who knows? I had half a mind to bring her home with me, to see what a refining process would make of her; but I must confess, my heart misgave me when I saw her in her native element, climbing

trees with the spryest squirrel, or running races with the swiftest hare."

"O Walter! you could not have thought seriously of such a thing," said his sister; "I would as soon attempt to tame a young bear."

"So would I; therefore I did not bring her; but come, Cicy dear, now for your secret. Who is this Clarence Willoughby, that has suddenly assumed such importance in your eyes?"

"He is a young English officer, whose deeds of valor have won for him many marks of royal favor; his birth and family are unexceptionable," said Mrs. Everson, to relieve her daughter from the embarrassment of replying.

"So they should be, to match my queenly sister," exclaimed Walter, gazing proudly at the beautiful girl.

"A truce to all flattery, brother mine," said Cicely playfully, laying her soft, white hand on his arm, while still the blush deepened on her cheek; "come, gratify my curiosity, by repeating what your mountain seer told you."

Walter looked grave, while his mother interposed:

"Cicely, how can you have any curiosity about such an absurd thing? It was well enough, perhaps, for Walter to humor the ignorant creature, in return for her kindness to him, but I should be loth to believe either of you so weak as to believe any thing she might say. Walter, do chide your sister's folly."

"The best way to do that, mother, would be to take

her at once to the witch's hut, where one glance at the cabalistic paraphernalia with which it is crammed would be sufficient, I think, to satisfy her curiosity, especially if she should feel the piercing black eyes of the old crone and her wild child fixed upon her. Ugh! I never shall forget the thrill of horror with which I first encountered them."

"You only excite my curiosity more and more," cried Cicely, laughing; "come, will you go with me, Walter?"

"No, sis, heaven grant me freedom from such companionship for the rest of my life. I would not be ungrateful, even to a dog, but to such people, my purse is altogether the most agreeable medium through which to acknowledge an obligation."

"And you have done that very generously, if not wisely," added Mrs. Everson; "so I see no reason for wasting further thought upon them."

"Yet I should like to know what a professed fortune-teller would say to Walter," persisted Cicely; "do just let him repeat it once, mother; I'll call it folly, if you please, but I am really very curious to know."

"Well, Miss Eve," said Walter laughing, "you'll find yourself disappointed; she said but four words."

"Four words! how mysterious! what were they Walter?"

"'The past,' and 'your future,'" replied Walter, half-shuddering; now how much wiser are you, Cicy?"

"But she explained their meaning to you!"

"Yes, but not in words. To tell you the truth, there *was* something wonderful about it," Walter added seriously. "She showed me scenes in the past at which even you, mother, would have been astonished."

"*Showed* you! how?" Cicely asked eagerly.

"I can not say *how* she did it," he replied; "but in a darkened room, by the glare of a blue sulphureous flame, she held before me a glass, and bade me look into it. Considering the whole thing a joke, I obeyed. Judge of my amazement when faces and scenes, strangely familiar, passed like a panoramic view slowly over the surface; then came another, glorious! enchanting! but all unknown to me, which she pronounced my future."

"Whom and what did you see in it?" his sister asked, as Walter paused; "your future wife, of course."

"No more questions, if you please, Cicy," said he. "I see we have already transgressed mother's ideas of propriety, so let us talk of something else."

"Bertha Travers, for instance," said Cicely, with a roguish twinkle of her eye. "What a pity she hasn't returned yet."

"Not on my account," he replied carelessly. "It is a matter of perfect indifference to me where that costly piece of property keeps herself."

"Walter!"

The young man turned quickly at the stern manner in which his mother repeated his name.

"Pardon me, mother," said he. "Have I offended you?"

"Surprised more than offended, perhaps," she replied; "yet grieved more than all that you should speak thus of one who, I fondly hope, will yet become your wife."

"She is so beautiful, so rich, and then she loves you so well, brother," added Cicely earnestly.

"Bertha Travers *is* beautiful and rich, that I'll allow," Walter replied; "but she has no heart to love any one; *that* is exclusively devoted to her own little self. No, mother, when I marry — and there's time enough these ten years for that — there must be something besides beauty, rank, and wealth to satisfy me."

"What more *would* you have?" there spoke the worldly Mrs. Everson.

Walter bit his lips hesitatingly.

"I am not sure that I can answer your question satisfactorily to myself," at length he replied, smiling; "yet I *have* an ideal such as alone would meet the wants of my heart."

"And such as you will never find in this world," added his mother. "Ideal perfection will do for dreams and novels, but in real life, my son, you must take the world as you find it."

"I intend to, mother; but I must see more of it before I can take an Eve to my side. Walter Everson is too important a personage to be disposed of without

due reflection," he replied, in a half-jesting, half-serious manner.

"Round the woods, round the woods, and pick up a crooked stick at last," laughed Cicely. "Come, Walter dear, don't be foolish; marry Bertha Travers, and we'll go abroad together so happy. You'll never be sorry for it, I know."

"If I could only see through your enchanted glasses perhaps I shouldn't," he replied; "but you must remember the little archer has never smitten me with his shaft. I do not *love* Bertha Travers."

"Then I wouldn't marry her," promptly responded the beautiful girl, while a glow of tenderness overspread her features.

"There spoke the noble woman," Walter exclaimed, throwing his arm lovingly around her waist. "Were Clarence Willoughby here, he would need no other assurance of his future peace and happiness than that eloquent, soul-revealing look."

"I trust you did not suppose your sister wanting in affection towards her affianced husband," Mrs. Everson quietly remarked.

"Certainly not, mother; but in our circle, as you know, there are so many marriages of convenience, interest, or pride, that it is a rare thing to find the *heart* on their side. Thank God, Cicy is among those blessed few; I fear, though, I shall scarcely be missed in my absence."

"O Walter!" cried his sister, reproachfully, "you know better."

"We shall both miss you sadly, my son," said his mother; "but have you really decided to go next month?"

"Yes; and thus escape another biting cold winter. Only think, when you are wrapped in your sables or drawing shiveringly around your bright, cheerful fires, how I shall be reveling in the warm breezes of sunny France. And then I am weary of this idle life. I long to embrace more ardently my glorious profession."

"Your painting would be more appropriately styled a pastime than a profession," Mrs. Everson replied.

"No, it shall be my profession — that to which I will devote all the energy and talent I possess. Though it be not to earn my bread, I will yet produce something worthy of fame." Walter's eye kindled with enthusiasm as he spoke.

"And of yourself," added Cicely, earnestly, "let the canvas speak those noble thoughts too deep for utterance; let it embody that 'ideal' that shall show to woman what she may be — what she must be — ere to man she becomes what her Maker designed, a *fit* companion."

"Well done, Cicely. Clarence has worked wonders. But I shall not forget your words. You shall see my 'ideal,' though it may not be clothed in a living,

breathing form," Walter replied, with deep feeling, as he left the room.

"Going abroad will be the best cure for his foolish notions," Mrs. Everson remarked, as the door closed upon her son. "I wish he hadn't such peculiar views."

"One thing is certain," replied Cicely, twirling the diamond betrothal ring which glittered upon her finger. "Walter will never disgrace our family or himself by a *mesalliance.* The woman he marries must be the noblest of her sex."

"Perhaps some titled lady abroad," suggested her mother.

"Who knows?" added Cicely, opening wide her eyes at the happy thought. "I'm glad he doesn't love Bertha Travers, after all."

"Heaven grant he may do no worse," Mrs. Everson earnestly rejoined.

CHAPTER VII.

"HARK! 'tis the wind in yon red region grieves:
Who says the world grows better, growing old?
See! what poor trumpery on those pauper trees,
That can not keep, for all their fine gold leaves,
Their last bird from the cold."

"BETSY! Betsy Jepson! do stop rattling those dishes a minute and come here. Gim-i-*ni!* if this *don't* beat all!"

"What is it, husband?" and a pale worn face looked in at the door.

"What is it! just come here and see; there, what do you think of that for a fee, eh?"

"A fee, husband! surely you are joking."

"Gim-i-*ni!* I don't more'n half believe it myself; but there's the money; and there's what he wrote on the paper it was done up in—you just read and see."

"Ah! from Mr. Everson, your patient at the Devil's Crag," the Doctor's wife exclaimed, as she finished reading the note; "he has certainly rewarded you well for your unpleasant, toilsome visits up there."

"Rewarded me! bless your heart; he's given me

more'n I could earn in a year's practice among these hills."

Mrs. Jepson smiled, as she thought of the many uncollected bills her husband's benevolence would not permit him to reckon among his earnings.

"More than you generally receive, you mean," she added.

"Oh! well, we mustn't expect pay for every thing we do in this world; something must be put on the score of humanity. But what shall we do with all this money? there, Betsy, you take it; perhaps you'll find some good way to dispose of it. I shall give it to the first person that asks me, if I keep it."

The Doctor saw his wife's eye sparkle, her cheek flush, and her breath come thick and fast, as he placed the money in her hand.

"What is the matter, Betsy?" he asked with alarm.

"Nothing serious," she replied, smiling sadly: "a sudden craving—an irresistible desire—that was all."

"A craving—a desire—for what, wife?" The Doctor looked around, wondering, in his own infinite content, what could be wanting to complete her happiness.

"Food for this hungry, famishing mind," she replied with an energy that startled him. "O husband! you know not how I long for books, such as loaded my father's shelves till they groaned beneath the weight—books which are to the soul what meat is to the body."

"What a blind brute I have been all this time, Bessie," exclaimed the Doctor, striving in vain to check his

tears; "not to see how bare and comfortless this house must seem to you, after the beautiful home you left for a poor worthless fellow like me; Gim-i-*ni!* I an't fit to live, certain."

"Stop, husband," said Mrs. Jepson, and her sad smile gave place to one of affection; "to a woman's heart, a home of love is ever beautiful. While I have your noble, loving, strong heart to rest upon, there is no such word as 'comfortless' in my vocabulary."

"Bless you, Bessie; you always was too good for me; O dear! why didn't I think that you must want books. I'd have walked clear to Boston after them; but I'm always just so forgetful: there, duckey, you shall have every cent of that money; and what's more, we'll go to Philadelphia and see your sister Lyddy, that's what we will," and the good Doctor sealed his words with a hearty kiss.

"You mean to overwhelm me with joy," his wife replied, while the worn look seemed already fading from her face; "how little did I anticipate such a result to your mountain visits."

"That Everson was a capital fellow—proud as Lucifer though; but, ha! ha! ha! Esther Cram was as proud as he; she wouldn't take a cent for her trouble."

"She has some *human* nature about her then."

"Yes, more than folks generally imagine. She has seen better days, certain; but what do you think that young fellow did when he found she wouldn't take any thing? Why, he just deposited three hundred dollars

in the bank in my name, and asked me to use it to educate that little wild one of hers.

"What! Wild Nell!" Mrs. Jepson exclaimed, with an expression of disgust.

"Yes, and I tell you she'll make a right smart girl, if we can only get her started; I'm more afraid we shan't get old Esther's consent. Come, Betsy, go up there with me this afternoon and see what you can do with her."

"I'm afraid you've undertaken more than you can accomplish, husband; and I much question whether the little creature can be tamed sufficiently to learn her A B Cs; but I'll go up with you, for I've quite a curiosity to see how they live." . . . . .

Chill September winds sighed through the forests, ere Walter Everson had left his mountain retreat. Now, October's golden sun wove the gay covering with which it was wont to hide summer's departing footsteps. Over nature's green mantle it laid its kaleidoscopic touch, quickly changing the cool refreshing hue into brilliant-tinted Autumn robes. A merry leave-taking the rich garniture of the mountains seemed to have, as in whirling, mazy dances, bright leaves swept around in all their gorgeous array, now in graceful minuet, waving their last adieu from the topmost branch of some lofty tree, or gleefully clasping a gaudy partner, off they fly in the dizzy waltz, and are seen no more; then with more majestic sweeps gliding swiftly through the opening vista, crowds press on, alas! where? Ah! have not autumn leaves their living prototypes?

Wild Nell had learned to dread this precursory brilliancy—this royal disrobing for the grave. Though her uncultivated but artistic eye dwelt with rapture upon the harmonious blending of richest hues in which her loved forest was gayly decked, the wild winds whispered to her shuddering ear that soon, beneath a cold winding-sheet would all be hid from sight. Then, no more rambles for her—no more mad frolics with Lolo at her side—no climbing the rocky hight "to see the world wake up"—nothing before her but a long, dreary, cold winter within the cheerless hut. What wonder, then, that she kept a jealous, miserly watch over her leafy domain, or that the first mellow tint—the first crimson streak on the foliage, found no welcome in her angry glance? But never had cold winds moaned so mournfully their requiem—never wore nature so sad a parting look to the lonely child, as in the weeks succeeding Walter Everson's departure. He had awakened the spirit of unrest within her; he had told her of the great world upon which she gazed in the morning light—of its pleasures and cares, joys and sorrows. As an incentive to her, he had pictured in glowing colors the honor and happiness *learning* gives. Most of his words fell meaningless upon the ear of the ignorant child, but their very mystery inspired her with awe for him who uttered them. Had he told her that he held the sun, moon, and stars at his command—that the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them belonged to him, she would have believed implicitly every word, so great and good did he

appear in her eyes. Alas for thee, poor Nell! The book is at last opened before thee—the book of mysteries, of which the greatest is *Life*. But its first lesson hath been falsely taught thee. Even *he*, thy teacher, from whose lips such words of wondrous wisdom seemed to fall, even he hath not yet learned the simplest truth within those leaves. He hath inspired thee with adoration and worship for the *creature*, but while his own heart acknowledges no higher allegiance, how can he point thee to the great Creator?—how strike the key-note to nature's glorious harmony, while his own ear is filled with naught but discordant sounds?

But he had gone; and, as the child in restless mood, wandered from haunt to haunt—now watching with momentary delight the wild frolics of the bright-hued leaves in the wind, then, with saddened look, thinking of the dreary blank which these gay revels but too surely betokened, a thought—a dream, dim and indistinct at first, gradually assumed form and intensity, till it filled her whole being. It was, to see and know more of the great world, of which Walter Everson had given her such enchanting glimpses. Little did Esther Cram, to whom the young man's presence had been as a dream of the past, imagine what strange visions he had brought to her child; for Wild Nell had never repeated to her his words; she had instinctively concealed the burning desire they had awakened. What then was the mother's surprise, when, firmly rejecting the zealous Doctor's kind and generous offer to educate her child, she saw Wild Nell

leap down from her hiding-place in the rafters, and with eager, imploring look, cry out: "O mammy! do let me go."

"Pooh! child, you don't know what they mean; go off and play with Lolo," she replied sharply.

"I do know, mammy, I do know," persisted the child; "le'm me go, I say;" then, overcoming her natural timidity, she turned to the strange lady who accompanied the Doctor, with an appealing glance; "make her le'm me go," she whispered, plucking her sleeve.

"I can not make her, if she chooses not to," Mrs. Jepson replied, with a kind voice and pleasant smile; "but I hope your mother will conclude to let you go."

"School is no place for such as she," Esther Cram retorted in an ungracious manner; "better let her alone."

"But, Mrs. Cram, you would not have your child grow up in entire ignorance, would you?" asked Mrs. Jepson pleasantly.

"Better so than learn evil," the mother replied, but there was a slight tremor in her voice which Nell's instinct at once detected.

"She's gon' to let me—she's gon' to let me," she shouted, clapping her hands.

"What makes you want to go to school so much?" Mrs. Jepson asked with curiosity.

"O cause, *he* said I must learn to read; won't he be glad though?" cried Nell eagerly.

"Gim-i-*ni!* the gal's going crazy, certain," said the

Doctor; "come, Esther Cram, you'll have to give in; what's the use in holding out so against your duty? you can't expect to keep the child up here always; she's got to see the world, and get her own living in it yet, likely as not. Supposing your mother had let you grow up as ignorant as my old horse, eh?"

"And then you need not be separated from Nell," suggested Mrs. Jepson; "there's that little cottage near our house, just big enough for you two, where you can live through the cold winter, and when summer comes you can come back here if you wish. Really, Mrs. Cram, I do not see how you can refuse."

For a moment Esther Cram stood in silence; then her piercing glance turned from the eager, uplifted face of her child, to those who thus plead with her, and in low and measured tones she spoke:

"I know not of what spirit ye are sent; but the jewel ye would pluck is the last of earth's treasures to me—the one bright spot ye would darken is all that lights me in my living tomb. Away! away! I can not say thee nay; I *will not* say thee yea."

"But we do not wish to rob you of your child," said Mrs. Jepson earnestly; "we only ——"

"Stay—it is enough," interrupted the fortune-teller, raising her finger significantly; "in one month hence, you shall know my decision; till then see me not;" and turning, she disappeared behind the screen.

"Gim-i-*ni!* that woman is a perfect shower-bath; she keeps one trembling and shivering all the time,"

exclaimed the Doctor, as they emerged from the hut and slowly descended the mountain; "what do you say, Betsy, will the gal be worth so much trouble after all?"

"We shall not be troubled much with her, I imagine," his wife replied thoughtfully; "Esther Cram will never consent to the plan; yet now that I have seen the child, I feel already a deep interest in her. Would that we could save her from the ignorance and superstition of her miserable mother!"

CHAPTER VIII.

"Sore pierced by wintry winds,
How many shrink into the sordid hut
Of cheerless poverty."

"His step I've seen
Directed often to the low abode
Of such: 'twas his with kindly hand to dry
The trickling sorrows of forsaken ones."

It was not surprising that the novelty and excitement of her long journey, her deep joy in being once more enfolded in a sisterly embrace, the quickly sped hours of loving intercourse with that long absent sister, should have banished, for a time, from Mrs. Jepson's mind all thoughts of her mountain visit and the objects of her benevolent intentions. Many years had passed away since she transferred her mother's dying trust — the sister she almost idolized — to other and dearer guardianship; many years since she had looked upon the sweet face which, in childhood, ever rested upon her bosom or listened to the endearing tones of a voice familiar to her earlier years as the song of birds. And now, as she returned to her quiet home, after gazing once more upon that beloved face,

and hearing again the voice so dear to her soul, what wonder that all things seemed daguerreotyped with the radiant beauty of the one, and all space filled with the sweet melody of the other? She had found her sister in the midst of luxury, surrounded by the flattering distinction of a fashionable world, beautiful and accomplished far beyond what even her partial heart had predicted, but, what was infinitely more precious, she had found her the same simple-hearted, affectionate being from whom she had parted amid the smiles and tears of her bridal morn. Circumstances had combined to render that separation one of *years*, instead of the few months they then so fondly anticipated. The happy bride's sudden resolve to accompany her husband in one of his eastern voyages, (for Captain Waters commanded an Indiaman,) Mrs. Jepson's own marriage with the worthy Doctor, whom she had long loved, together with the slow, tedious modes of traveling in those days, had long prevented a meeting so eagerly desired by both sisters. The good Doctor well knew what joy he was bringing to the heart of his wife in the use he proposed to make of Walter Everson's munificent fee; but even he little dreamed of the new life it would create within her. Breaking in, as it did, upon her monotonous existence, with the sights and sounds of a world almost forgotten — opening to her vision scenes of wealth and splendor — bringing her cultivated, appreciative mind into contact with intelligence and refinement, and, above all, giving to her

arms again the sister, and almost child of her youth, it seemed to awaken a latent spark in her bosom, whose existence even her husband had never suspected.

"There, husband," she exclaimed, with a cheerful smile, as, after a long, fatiguing day's ride, she entered once more her plain but comfortable home, "you've brought back quite another wife with you. I'm going to be the happiest woman in the world now. How pleasant every thing seems here."

"Bless you for that, Bessie; I was afraid your sister Lyddy's grand home would make you sick of yours; you deserve as good as hers, certain."

"And I have as good, and even better," Mrs. Jepson replied merrily. "We are not shut up within four brick walls, like her city prison; and if we haven't soft carpets to tread upon, and cushioned chairs to receive our tired frames, we have the bracing mountain air to drive off fatigue, and nature's velvet turf beneath our feet whenever we choose to walk. No, I wouldn't exchange homes with Lydia, though that is better for her, no doubt."

"Gim-i-*ni!*" exclaimed the Doctor, endeavoring to clear the mist from his eyes as he went out, "who'd a-thought it! Well, Bessie always takes hold o' the right end o' every thing. I shan't forget that young Everson, certain, and I shan't forget what a wife I've got, neither."

Day after day rolled on, bringing in its turn biting frosts, piercing cold, and drifting snows, yet still Mrs.

Jepson, reveling in day-dreams, or feasting amidst the choicest stores of learning with which her sister's taste and generosity had supplied her, thought not of the poor mountain dwellers. Her husband, too, amid the accumulation of business which his absence had occasioned, forgot those for whom his sympathy had been stronger than his faith in their reclamation. But not long could hearts like theirs remain forgetful of the poor and needy. One evening, as they were seated before their cheerful fire, where the huge logs snapped and crackled as if to drown the dismal howl of the wind without, and the furious blasts with which, from time to time, the storm swept around their dwelling, the Doctor suddenly sprang from his chair, and exclaimed with energy, as he looked out on the driving snow:

"Gim-i-*ni!* Betsy, what do you s'pose has become of that old witch and her gal? I ought to be hanged, certain, for not going up to see 'em before."

"Sure enough, husband," Mrs. Jepson replied reproachfully. "How could we have forgotten them so? I shall never forgive myself if they have come to harm this inclement season. They were objects of Mr. Everson's generosity, as well as we, you know; poor creatures! how selfish I have been not to think of them before."

"You selfish, Betsy? 'Twas my fault, every mite on't; but I'll have 'em down here to-morrow, certain," and the Doctor nodded his head emphatically.

"How can you get up there through all these dreadful drifts?" Mrs. Jepson asked anxiously; "I fear you'll perish in the attempt."

"No danger o' that, Betsy. John and I'll take our big shovels, and Towser shall go to give the alarm in case we get buried in the snow," the Doctor replied cheerfully; "but what shall we do with the old hag when we get her here?"

"Keep our promise to her. Give her the little cottage over the way for her and her child to live in through the winter, and persuade her, if possible, to let the poor little neglected creature go to school."

"I don't know what young Everson was thinking of when he made me promise to educate her; but I'll try, any how."

True to his word, Dr. Jepson was up betimes the next morning, and with the aid of his stout "hired man" John, began the toilsome ascent to the "Devil's Crag." The storm had spent its wild fury during the dark hours of the night, and the sun, as it arose calm and clear, threw a dazzling brilliance over the scene, which fairies well might have coveted for their gem-studded grottoes and goldern caverns. Rocks, trees, and shrubs sparkled with diamond lustre, while the huge mountain before them blazed forth in its hoar-frost garments, as in rivalry with the source from which it borrowed its scintillant glory. Where in courtly palaces or on kingly thrones can the ermine badge of royalty be more rightfully worn or more grace-

fully draped than around the spot where nature raises its head to assert its own above all earthly grandeur? Such a spot was Mount ———, and most royally did it wear its kingly robe on that glorious morning. But though to the eye all was resplendence and glory, the poor Doctor and his companion found it but a wearisome task to force their way through the untrodden snow up the precipitous path to where their errand led them.

"There, dang it, I'll be blowed if I go a step further," exclaimed John, with the privileged freedom of servants in those days, as they stopped to rest about a third of the way up; "it's a sorry job you've got hold on, and ye may finish it yourself, for all me; blast it, I'm a'most froze now," and he began rubbing his limbs vigorously.

"Pooh! nonsense, John," the Doctor replied good-humoredly, "I've seen you stand worse cold than this without flinching. You may go back if you want to; but I an't a-goin' to give up so, certain. The old witch and her gal will haunt me now till I've seen her and done my duty about that school matter."

"Send the devil to school as quick," John muttered, with kindling wrath. "That young imp would scare all the children out of the school'us in one day."

"I shouldn't wonder," rejoined the Doctor, laughing, "though she looks worse than she really is; but come, John, go back if you're going; I must push along up. Ugh! I wish I'd never seen the old hag."

"You an't the only one as wishes so," said John, taking up his shovel and preceding the Doctor despite his declaration a moment before; "she's done more mischief than her old neck's worth — setting the gals crazy with her fortune-telling, and makin' out honest folks no better'n rogues. I wish her daddy had her in his claws now."

"Her daddy! Who's that?"

"Old Nick, of course. They are as like as two peas."

"Ha! ha! John, I see you don't forget Molly yet; that was most too bad, certain."

"Molly Lawson never did it, though. 'Twas the devil that old hag put into her." John plied his shovel most lustily as he spoke, dashing the snow to the right and left in indignant contemplation of his wrongs. Molly Lawson had been his promised wife, but Esther Cram, in return for the silly girl's silver, foretold her a rich husband and many other fine things, which completely turned her head, and made her look down upon poor John with contempt. No wonder the disconsolate fellow owed the fortune-teller a grudge for thus destroying his hopes.

"Molly and you'll make up again yet, likely as not," said the Doctor, to cheer him.

"Don't you never say that to me agin, old feller," John replied, bringing his shovel down with a jerk. "I can't have my feelins harrered up so. The devil's got her, and he may keep her for all me."

"I sh'd think he'd got you by the way you thrash

the snow about." said the Doctor, laughing. "But Gim-i-*ni!* here we are," he added, as, coming around a rock, they found themselves close by the hut.

"Yes, here *we* are," John answered, with a grin, "but where be they?" pointing to the trackless snow all around, and then to the door, which was barred upon the outside.

With a sudden exclamation of alarm, the Doctor rushed first to one window and then to another, the broken panes giving him an unobstructed view of the still, frightful interior of that wretched abode.

"Gim-i-*ni!* they're gone!" at length he exclaimed, turning upon John a look of astonishment.

"Gone to the old boy, where they oughter gone long ago," John doggedly replied.

Without heeding him, Dr. Jepson seated himself upon the stump of a tree — the same from which he had once watched Wild Nell's perilous descent from the rocks above.

How changed the scene since that bright, glorious summer morning! Then the mountain forest waved its luxuriant foliage to each soft passing breeze. Then earth and air, instinct with life and song, seemed but the play-ground of dancing sunbeams. *Now*, through leafless branches shrieked and howled the piercing blast, ever and anon awakening echoes fierce and wild along the deserted mountain side. Save the shrill, discordant sounds, all was solitary and still; the earth, in its dazzling whiteness, looking like some glorified thing

with neither mortal taint nor touch. To one of the Doctor's temperament, the scene was oppressively sublime; even the croaking voice and ungainly form of Esther Cram, or the presence of her elfish child, would have been a welcome relief at that moment. But they had gone; whether to hide in the dens and caves of the earth, like the other wild inhabitants of the mountain forest, or to seek food and shelter among the abodes of men, or to find a cold grave beneath the shrouding snow, none knew. Some such thought as the last seemed to arouse the Doctor from his reverie, for he sprang up suddenly, exclaiming, with energy:

"I an't no better'n a murderer, certain, to neglect them poor things so. Come, let's go, John. What will Bessie say now?" and with one more look within the lonely hut, they slowly descended to their home.

CHAPTER IX.

"MOREOVER, something is or seems,
That touches me with mystic gleams,
Like glimpses of forgotten dreams—
Of something felt, like something here;
Of something done, I know not where;
Such as no language may declare."

WHY and whither had the missing ones fled? Why had not Esther Cram, with her usual forethought, prepared her hut, poor and wretched though it was, still her only home, for the pitiless storms of winter? Why had she not, as in years past, laid by her stores, and then withdrawn herself and child within those miserable walls, to pass another tedious, inclement season of mere animal existence? Why, indeed, but that the demon of unrest, which had so mightily stirred her child's heart, had reached her own also! Oh! there were moments when its terrible ravings would have seemed cheaply silenced by the sacrifice of life itself. Such were those which followed the departure of Doctor Jepson and his wife, to whose visit and its object we have already alluded. Esther Cram watched their retreating footsteps with a demoniacal expression of exultation and hatred in her face.

"Get ye gone," she muttered between her teeth, "many a long day'll pass ere these eyes look upon you again; beware of the lioness, when ye seek to tear the whelp from her side;" then striding to the door, she shrieked rather than called, "Nell, Nell."

A shrill echo was the only reply, as her fierce black eye peered up and down the mountain side. "Better so, perhaps," said she, walking off swiftly towards a favorite haunt; "trust not the hand that hides a wrathful heart; ha! has it come to this? would I raise my hand against the only one who has a drop of my blood in her veins? But *they* would do worse; they would refine her mind, only to [illegible] it for more exquisite torture; they would beautify her person only to make its final immolation more sure and fearful. 'Twould be kinder far to snatch her from such a fate, and lie down with her on the cold, dark earth. But some power withholds me; *I can not do it.* O Nell, Nell! cursed be the day that brought light to your eyes; or rather, cursed be he who —— No, I can not curse Arthur's child. Alas! woe! woe is on every side."

"D'ye call me, mammy?" cried Nell, from the top of a high rock near.

"Yes—no—come here," was the reply, half-yearningly, half-defiantly. Nell knew her mother's moods well enough to come down fearlessly to her side. She longed also to know the result of the Doctor's request, so warmly urged by herself.

"Say, mammy," said she, pulling her sleeve, "may I go?"

All the fierce passions of Esther Cram's nature seemed aroused by this simple question, accompanied, as it was, by an earnest, pleading look.

"Hence, viper," she cried, pushing her rudely away, "lest I crush you to the earth. Must you too league with them that would rob me? Shall my own flesh and blood rise up against me, and I, fool, idiot that I am, cringe before ye all? No!" she screamed, bringing down her bony fist violently: "No! you shan't go; d'ye hear that?"

"Then I'll run away!" Nell's eyes flashed as fiercely as her mother's then, and she stamped her little foot in her anger. Strange to say, this defiant reply changed the wrath of Esther Cram into admiration of the little dilated form and anger-swollen face of her child.

"Ye'll run away, will ye?" said she, laughing; "and where'll ye run to, eh?"

"To see the world," Nell quickly replied.

"Poor child, poor child," said her mother, "eager to rush upon your fate! Something's got to be done, I see," she added, in a lower tone—"I have it—yes, you *shall* see the world, Nell, but not in the way they would have you. Listen, child; you and I'll run off together, and we'll wander all about and see all the beautiful things in the world."

"And learn to read?" interrupted Nell.

"Pshaw! child, no; I don't want you to learn to read."

"But *he* said 'twould make me good," Nell urged, edging up to her mother in her earnestness.

"He? O Nell! has the spell already begun to weave around you? There, go bid Lolo good-by, for to-morrow we leave this accursed place. Even here, in these dens, these caves, the world's poisonous breath has come and cursed the whole. Hear, O ye spirits!" she cried, stretching forth her arms in the deepening twilight; "I go and come not hither again, till by your arts the charm is broken and my child saved;" then in silence she strode quickly back to her hut.

Ere the sun arose the next morning, the fortune-teller cautiously guided her child down the mountain, in a direction opposite to where the village lay. To elude observation, though chance could scarce throw a traveler in her way in those solitary regions, she avoided her usual paths, and through tangled thickets and close underbrush led the way. Nell followed with beating heart and high hopes. What sights would meet her eye—what sounds her ear, in that great, unexplored world whither she was going! Could she have paused upon its threshold, and with prophetic eye pierced the vail of the temple within, how would she have shrunk from the dread ordeal! Well for us is it, that only one by one the mysteries of our being are unfolded—that single-handed come our foes, whom we may vanquish, if we will, by the two-edged sword of truth and righte-

ousness, ere they rank and file into invincible columns. Well that *all* of life is not open to one eager glance, else our fainting spirits would sink by the wayside in despair; our feeble faith seeing no golden city, but only the thorny road which leads thereto.

Thus for days and weeks they wandered on, scarce heeding toil or cold, so full of eager curiosity was Nell, and her mother so intent upon accomplishing a secret purpose; for Esther Cram, in her frenzy, had resolved to revisit the spot where her own youth was blighted—where she had learned the bitter lesson which made her an outcast among men. So, by her sybilline arts, beguiling from the credulous many a bright bit of silver, or by piteous tales receiving food and shelter from the benevolent, Esther Cram still led on her child, till the glittering spires of a noble city were before them, when, with a familiar nod of recognition, she turned into one of its by-ways, and they were lost to sight.

"O lor! missus, dere's de orfullest curessest poor old whitey down stairs!"

Cicely Everson was aroused from her listless mood by the exclamations of the servant.

"What! another beggar, Dinah?" she replied reprovingly; "didn't mother tell you to turn them all off, and bring no more of their messages to her?"

"Laws, yes, missus, but dis an't no beggar 't all; plenty o' money in her pocket."

"What does she want, then, and who is she?"

"He-he-he! missus, 'pears like she cum from de deebil hisself, and bring a young imp 'long wid her, too;" and Dinah crammed her apron into her mouth, to prevent an explosion of the merriment with which she viewed her own conceit.

"You silly girl," said Cicely, smiling at the servant's glee; "I must go and see what sort of a creature you've got down there. Ah! here comes Sir Clarence; tell the woman to wait awhile."

"Deed, missus, 'tan't no woman 't all, nuffin but a fortin-teller," Dinah replied, leaving the room at Sir Clarence's entrance.

"What was your servant saying about a fortune-teller just as I came in?" he asked, with interest. Cicely laughingly repeated Dinah's words.

"If it be the one I saw down street this morning, attracting such crowds about her, you must not fail to see her," Clarence replied; "she and her child are perfect nondescripts; indeed, I should like to have a nearer view of the strange creatures myself."

"Dinah shall show them up here," said Cicely, with glee, springing to the bell-rope, "and we'll have our fortunes told. Mother is out, fortunately, so we shall not have to combat her prejudices."

"Capital," echoed her lover, "we will have some sport."

Dinah rolled her white eye-balls with astonishment at her young mistress' order, but with a suppressed haw-haw, she obeyed.

"Dere she be," she exclaimed, a moment after, ushering in the strange visitors; "dere's my missus."

"That!" said Esther Cram, (for it was she,) pointing her long, bony finger toward Cicely, "I seek one not so young or fair as she."

"My mother, perhaps," suggested Cicely, involuntarily recoiling from the uncouth creatures.

The fortune-teller fixed her piercing glance upon her, while Nell, intimidated, shrank behind her mother's scanty dress.

"Beauty and pride," she muttered, "cursed inheritance; but ten-fold accursed in your father's child."

"You seek not to please by smooth words, certainly," Cicely replied good-naturedly; "here, take this; it may, perhaps, win for me a better fate," and she dropped a coin into the crone's hand.

"Silver or gold can not change thy fate, fair lady," the fortune-teller replied, "he who sits beside thee holds the conjurer's wand o'er thee."

"Bravo!" cried Sir Clarence, slipping more money into her hands; "now let the conjurer crave thy guidance of *his* wand."

"Thy own brave heart is thy best guide, young man; yet, beware of that demon, the birthright of thy fair bride, the bane of Arthur Everson's life."

"What mean your words?" cried Cicely, amazed, "how can you know aught of my father, who has been in his grave these many years?"

Esther Cram paused a moment, her hard features

convulsed with agitation; then, with a choking voice, she answered: "Lady, I could a tale unfold that would bow your haughty spirit in the dust; yet, for your brother's sake, he who, more than thou, dost bear thy father's image, I forbear."

"My brother! who and what is she, Clarence?" Cicely exclaimed, with increasing astonishment.

"A fortune-teller," he replied, smiling.

At this moment, Nell, who had gradually emerged from behind her mother, as she found herself unnoticed, sprang forward with a wild shout, clapping her hands "O mammy! mammy!" she cried, "see there!"

Every eye was instantly turned towards the object which had drawn forth the shrinking, frightful-looking child, and lighted up her face with such eager enthusiasm. It was a painting, over which Walter Everson had spent his leisure hours, in attempting to transcribe the scene of his adventures. In living, glowing colors, did the wild beauty of that mountain scenery seem to stand forth, while in contrast, yet hightening the effect, was the miserable hut where he had spent so many wretched days and nights. To Nell, all other wonders were lost in this, as she gazed spell-bound upon the vision. She heeded neither her mother's fierce exclamations nor piteous wailings, as at the first glance she broke forth: "What furies sent me hither, to see fate settling coldly but surely upon its victim! I will root up every tree, I will tear splinter by splinter every board from that accursed place in this wild struggle. O Nell! I

thought to gainsay their arts, and pluck thee from their jaws; but 'tis in vain. Come, fate will have it so;" then, turning to her astonished listeners, she said, in a voice made more impressive by violent gestures: "Fool, fool that I was; twice blasted in my life beneath this roof; remember, proud girl, that but for me your father —no I will not betray Arthur; the time has not yet come; but you, and that haughty woman *he* called *wife*, shall live to plead, and plead in vain, a boon from Esther Morrison! Farewell!" And dragging her bewildered child after her, the fortune-teller left the house forever.

CHAPTER X.

"From to and fro the world I come,
Where I have fared as exiles fare,
Mocked by the memories of home,
And homeless every where."

Although Mrs. Jepson had been much shocked at the disappearance of Esther Cram and her child, whom all their efforts could not trace, yet could she have known of their safety, her relief from an unpleasant responsibility concerning them must have been most grateful. But she was a conscientious woman, keenly alive to her own faults and violations of duty. Such she considered her negligence of those poor creatures, and many an hour of self-accusation and reproach had she passed on their account. Nor when the sunny smiles of spring brought back music to the forest, and beauty and verdure to the earth, did she cease to lament the thoughtlessness which had, perhaps, sent them to an untimely grave. Her pleasure, as well as astonishment, may therefore be conceived, when, at the close of a pleasant day, as she was quietly strolling through the woods, the fortune-teller suddenly stood before her.

Her dress was soiled and torn, her hair disheveled, and on her face an expression of deep dejection, as from some terrible calamity. The latter instantly attracted Mrs. Jepson's attention, who quickly exclaimed: "Why, Mrs. Cram, where have you come from, and why are you so sad? Is your child ——"

"Dead, you would say," Esther Cram hastily added, as Mrs. Jepson hesitated; "no, there's no such mercy for her as that; she won't die, and I—I can't kill her."

"Poor woman! you little realize what you say; but tell me where you have been through all the long winter, and where your child is; we have made great search for you."

"Ask me no questions; I have brought *her* back—now is the light of Esther Cram's life gone out in darkness." As she said this, the fortune-teller threw herself upon the ground, with a wail of agony and despair so terrible, Mrs. Jepson sank involuntarily and shuddering upon a rude seat near. For a moment she spoke not, judging it wisest to suffer the paroxysm to spend itself; then, in a soft and gentle tone, so soothing to the wounded spirit, she said:

"What can I do for you, my poor friend? Such violent grief must have some great cause—confide in me; I assure you I would gladly aid you."

The fortune-teller did not raise her head, and Mrs. Jepson continued:

"For the sorrowing heart there is much comfort, if we will only accept it; for the greatest sins there is for-

giveness, if we only ask it; be comforted, then, my friend, for whatever the cause of your distress, there is One who knows it all, and is even now waiting to apply the healing balm to your wounded heart."

"Do you call me 'friend?'" Esther Cram asked, in a broken voice, raising herself to a sitting posture upon the earth; "and have you one spark of real kindness towards such a poor, wretched creature?"

"Indeed I have!" Mrs. Jepson eagerly replied; "we are children of the same great Father, and though he has made us to differ in outward circumstances, he looks upon us with equal love. Why, then, should I not call you friend—nay, even offer you a *sister's* sympathy in your sorrow?"

"Are you mad! have you gone crazy, to talk thus to me? I have no friend—I am but a miserable outcast from God and man;" and the woman sank her face upon her hands despondingly.

"Oh! say not so, Mrs. Cram! none are ever cast out who seek his face. Even the guiltiest may find pardon and peace if they but ask. So, if you can not confide in me, go with your burden and lay it at *his* feet, who will give you joy for sorrow, and light for the darkness which now fills your soul."

As Mrs. Jepson spoke, she arose to pursue her homeward way, but Esther Cram sprang after her, and grasping her dress, cried:

"If you do not mock me, if you mean what you say, do not leave me now; for many wretched years have

passed since the tones of kindness fell on my ear. You have touched the heart I thought hardened forever; do not leave it quivering in its agony. Oh! stay and tell me what a poor wretch like me can do."

"Gladly will I stay," Mrs. Jepson replied, re-seating herself, "if I can say aught to comfort you; but will you not tell me why you fled from us when we would befriend you, and where you have passed this long, cold winter?"

"I will tell you all—yes, though to mortal eyes I had never thought to unvail my heart, something within whispers that I may trust you. You have known me, such as I am; a creature more allied to savage than civilized life—could you believe that this shriveled form was once symmetrical—this unsightly face, this grizzled hair, once called forth admiration for their beauty? or, that the 'witch,' whose cunning and ignorance have been alike bemoaned, was once the intelligent, refined maiden?"

"I have always noticed," Mrs. Jepson responded, as the fortune-teller paused, "that your language indicated a well-educated mind—it has, I grant, been a matter of surprise to me; but do not let me interrupt you; you have aroused my curiosity most intensely. Go on; meanwhile, perhaps we had better walk towards home—my husband will be looking for me."

"No, no! 'tis only in these wild woods my heart can find utterance; they sheltered me when, like a hunted deer, I fled from those I loved—they witnessed the

bloom of my youth fade and shrink away, leaving this grim visage, in mockery of the past. Here, where I have looked with tearless eye upon the face of the dead, whose cold form my heart rivaled in its stony hardness —here let me tell the tale I had thought no mortal power could have drawn from me."

Esther Cram paused a few moments, rocking to and fro, as if to quell the wild tumult of thought within, while Mrs. Jepson gazed wonderingly at the strange being. Her imagination could scarcely clothe her with the beauty she just hinted once belonged to her—the utmost stretch of credulity would scarce give *her* the form of a blooming, lovable maiden.

But the kind-hearted woman would not heed these thoughts; she looked with pity upon the wretched object before her—hers should be the mission to lead that poor, sinful, degraded one into the heavenly light in which her own soul had bathed, and where alone the plague-spots of sin could be cleansed from her heart. With a silent prayer for aid, she gently laid her hand upon the shoulder of her still absorbed companion.

"Come," said she cheerfully, "the night is fast approaching, and my husband will be alarmed at my late absence—yet I can not leave you in your sorrow; tell me your story, that I may know how to soothe you; confide in me, as in a sister who yearns to lead you out of your darkness."

Esther Cram raised her face, still convulsively working with deep emotion.

"I know not what fate has thus sent you to me," she said; "many years has the fortune-teller been a despised, contemned thing among you, and you have not lifted your hand to save her; why do you come to me now, when all the furies of the earth have combined against me? Avaunt!" she fiercely shrieked, springing up wildly; "I know ye now! they have taken your form to decoy and crush me. Follow me at your peril," she added, shaking her finger towards her affrighted companion, as she disappeared among the trees.

Fear lent swift wings to Mrs. Jepson, as she sped homeward; and the horrible thought that she had been in the power of a maniac in that lonely spot, effectually banished sleep from her pillow that night.

But as she reviewed the scene by morning light, commiseration for one so utterly miserable and forsaken overcame all other feelings, and she determined not to abandon her mission of love, without at least one more effort.

She was spared, however, the dreaded task of seeking out its object, by the appearance of Esther Cram at her door that afternoon. The night had done its work for her too; something more than sleepless vigils was written upon her wrinkled brow, as, in a humble, subdued manner, she craved pardon for wronging in thought the only one who had shown an interest in her fate.

"Could you but know," she urged in extenuation, "how the mocking laugh of demons rings in my ear, at every throb of despair—how in fiendish whispers they

deride and jeer at my misery, you would pity the madness that even for a moment could invest your form and face with their spirit."

"They are the demons of your imagination," Mrs. Jepson replied kindly, "though your occupation may have led you to believe in their reality. But where is your child?" she asked, hoping to renew their last night's conversation.

"Up on the rocks yonder I left her; poor child, her life has all gone from her! Shall I tell you, pure and good woman that you are, how the temptation has sorely beset me, to save her from her ill-starred fate, by laying her quietly down to sleep forever?"

"Indeed, you must not talk so, Mrs. Cram," said Mrs. Jepson reprovingly; "you have no right to take the fate of any being into your hands; neither can you by any arts tell what that fate may be; but you can and ought to use every means in your power, to prepare her for a useful and happy life here, and a joyful one hereafter."

"*Hereafter!*" Esther Cram repeated with emphasis; "there is no hereafter; 'twould be poor consolation to think that this bitter life must be prolonged beyond the grave."

"What if that life could be changed into a glad and glorious one!—what if death could guide us from out our darkness into eternal sunshine! Would it not be worth striving for?"

"Yes, surely; but it is not so; death is an eternal

sleep, and one which I often long for too," the fortune-teller sadly replied.

Mrs. Jepson took from the table near a well-worn Bible, and opening its leaves, read aloud:

"For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God; a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

"For if we believe Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him."

"And many of them which sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting contempt."

"And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain."

"I could read to you many more such passages," said Mrs. Jepson, closing the book; "the word of God is full of them; how then can you say there is no hereafter?"

"I had a Bible once," said Esther Cram musingly, without noticing the question; "perhaps if I had read it more I might have been a different woman. But it's too late now," she added almost fiercely.

"No, no, Mrs. Cram, it is never too late—this same Gospel invites just such as you to receive its blessed promises in believing faith."

"Your words might once, perhaps, have touched my

heart," the fortune-teller replied, "but now they fall on stony ground. I'm hardened, I tell you; hard as the rocks on yonder mountain. Would you know why? listen and I will tell you a story."

"There was once a gay, young, beautiful girl, the pride and joy of her father's house, caressed and flattered as only *heiresses* can be. Life to her was one cloudless sunshine; nor did she dream that trouble and sorrow could ever cross her path. But they came; first, when her beloved father lay still and cold in his shroud before her—then, as, with an aching heart, she watched her mother's pale face grow daily paler and thinner, till she too lay beneath the sod.

"Poor Esther, in her stunning grief, little dreamed there might be yet a bitterer cup for her to taste—that the cold, averted looks of those most obsequious in her sunny days but too surely presaged a coming blow, yet more terrible to bear. But thus it was; for, at her father's death, it was ascertained that by unfortunate speculations his property was lost, his widow and child left penniless. The tale was not softened to meet her ear, for who then cared for the poor orphan?

"Yet there was one noble youth who thought of his playmate in her grief, and who persuaded his mother to receive her under her roof, to earn by her skillful needle the home and shelter thus bestowed.

"So the heiress became a seamstress in the house where she had been wont to visit on equal terms. But

she bore up bravely, for there was a strong arm ever near ready to support her—a warm heart breathing its own faith and love into hers.

"Soon, however, his proud mother saw the danger, and with stinging words—words that burned into that young girl's soul—sent her from her door.

"In vain did her son plead that in birth, education, every thing but fortune, was she more than his equal—that would not his mother see his happiness wrecked forever, she must yield to his entreaties. The haughty woman was inexorable, and the unhappy girl fled—fled, though he passionately entreated her to become his wife, despite his mother's anger.

"But the wisdom of years had been given her in those short months; she would not be the rock on which their boasted family pride should ever beat; and so she fled—fled from the face of man, and became the companion of beasts.

"Many years agone was that, and when her heart had grown callous, her face and form hideous to the eye, there came one day to her wild home the image of him she had loved. Wounded and bleeding, he lay upon her bed, his every word and look awakening maddening memories of the past. Then it was that from out the darkness came whisperings to her ear alone, that the blight which had fallen upon her youth should descend also upon her child—that all she possessed on earth to love should again be sacrificed to an Everson's

pride; then it was that an evil eye seemed ever to rest upon her child when Arthur's son was near.

"But the spell is cast; no arts can save her now. You may educate her if you will—she's lost to me forever." Again came forth that terrible wail of grief, as from a breaking heart.

"Poor woman!" exclaimed Mrs. Jepson, wiping the tears which fell fast from her own eyes; "your story is indeed a sad one, but you must not suffer your imagination to lead you to despair; trust me, your child will yet be a comfort to you. So Walter Everson was the son of your lover! strange indeed are the ways through which we are led!"

"I have been again within those walls—pride and beauty are still there; but oh! save my child from their curse—save her, as you believe in a hereafter!"

Esther Cram went out as she spoke, and hastened to her mountain solitude, leaving Mrs. Jepson to ponder over the strange tale she had heard, and weave in imagination a happy sequel.

CHAPTER XI.

"Something dim and something vast,
Out of reach of all I say;
Language ceases, . . . hushed, aghast,
What am I, to curse or pray?
God succeeds at last!"

Up the narrow, steep path, the fortune-teller walked like one in a dream. Squirrels leaped nimbly from branch to branch above her head, watching with their little bright eyes for the cheerful "chirrup" with which she was wont to greet them. Timid hares crept from under the green leaves at her familiar tread, looking wistfully for the customary crumbs. Even the birds, eyeing askance her approach, hopped from bough to bough, keeping pace with her, singing, meanwhile, their sweetest songs. But all were alike unheeded.

She passed along, every sense absorbed in fierce inward conflict, till reaching her own door, she barred herself within, where, unseen and unheard, her heart could vent its anguish.

"Woe! woe is me!" she cried aloud, "I'm dashed upon the rocks! I'm torn in pieces; my heart is rent asunder! my brain is on fire! help, ye fiends! whose

bidding I have done these many years; can *ye* not quench this consuming fire? Ay, ye laugh, ye mock at my misery! away with your hellish forms! I defy your power! I defy God himself! Ha! what's that! '*Hereafter?*' Who dare whisper that in my ear? There is no hereafter. They lie who say it. '*What if there should be?*' Hell and furies! who talketh thus to me? Ha! ha! well, if there should be, what then——" but the words died away on her lips as the passages she had that afternoon heard came vividly before her—so vividly, they seemed written in characters of fire.

"My mother believed in the Bible," she murmured in a softer tone. "'*They that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake.*' If that be true, then *she* will awake, and my father and Arthur; but oh! when, when? '*There shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain;*' could this but be true! But what if it be? 'Tis for those who have lived a good and useful life—not for such an outcast as I. She said it was for *all* who asked; but who shall I ask, and how? I remember in my happy days my father used to kneel and pray, morning and night, with my mother and me; but I don't know how, and if I did, there's none to hear *me.* Ha! ha! ha! Esther Cram on her knees! what a sight that would be! No! I'll believe none of their talk; this night I'll go to yonder cave; the spirits shall guide me still. But oh! my child! my child!"

The pent-up cloud broke at last, and down, like shower-drops falling upon the parched earth, came the mother's tears to the mother's heart. Esther Cram wept as she never wept before; first with a violence which shook her whole frame; then gradually subsiding to the soft and gentle flow so fertilizing to the heart. Ere she had ceased, a light step approached the door, and Nell, admitted, gazed with wonder upon her mother's face.

"What ails ye, mammy?" she softly asked.

Esther Cram's quivering lips could not frame a reply, but she caught her child frantically to her breast and again gushed forth streams from the newly-opened fountain, till Nell began to withdraw in fear from her mother's convulsive embrace.

"Le'm me go," she cried, struggling to release herself, "you hurt me."

"Thus will it ever be," said her mother in a sorrowful tone, loosening her hold, "my child shall learn to shun the arm that would brave all things for her sake."

Nell crept timidly from her mother's presence to her little resting-place, where, with the soft touch of slumber upon her eyelids, childhood's hopes and fears were soon forgotten.

Not thus could Esther Cram gain even momentary oblivion as she sat there in the gathered darkness, which was as noonday compared with the midnight gloom within her breast. No gentle, somnolent breath

could waft into the land of dreams the keen, vivid truths against which she had arrayed herself. A battle fierce and wild must be fought with the new foe which had so strangely intruded. Would she turn her steps to the haunts her excited imagination had ever peopled with familiar spirits, lo in her path, with hands upraised and gray hairs streaming in the wind, *knelt* the father she had lost, while with mild, loving eyes beaming upon her, she who had cradled her infancy pointed above. Turn where she would, those silent pleading looks seemed to follow her, while in her ear, as though mortal spoke, sounded the solemn words:

"And many of them which sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt."

Ah! Esther Cram, thou hast indeed no common foe to meet this night! all the arts that thou hast learned will avail thee naught now! nothing but pure, naked truth can stand when *conscience* speaks! Happy for thee if that voice be heeded! thrice happy if, in that foe, thou find'st at last a friend!

"I'm come."

Let it not detract from the nobleness of her heart, that a slight shudder crept over Mrs. Jepson as she turned to the door from whence these simple words proceeded, and where stood the ragged, bare-footed, weird-looking child who uttered them. Her dreaded task seemed suddenly spread out before her, and for a

moment she recoiled from it; but it was only for a moment, for hers was not a nature to shrink from duty, be it ever so revolting. So with a cheerful smile she approached the child, saying:

"You've come, have you? And what have you come for?"

"To learn to read and be good," Nell promptly replied.

"Why do you want to be good?" Mrs. Jepson asked, to draw her out.

"Oh! 'cause *he* said I must."

"Poor child! I trust you will learn a better motive than that. But come in, Nell. If you're to be my little girl, you must change those ragged, dirty clothes for something more decent."

"I an't gon' to be your little gal. I'm mammy's gal!" Nell exclaimed, drawing back with a flashing eye

Pleased with the child's filial feeling, Mrs. Jepson took her hand kindly, saying:

"That is right, Nell; though you must not look and speak so angrily. You must always love your mother. I do not wish to take you from her; but you can not go to school and learn to read, as you wish, unless you are more tidy and clean."

Thus appealed to, Nell submitted, though reluctantly, to the ablutions and change Mrs. Jepson insisted upon.

"What's all this?" exclaimed the Doctor, coming in just as she had succeeded, with the aid of comb, brush,

and scissors, in smoothing the elfish locks, "this an't the witch's gal, is it?"

"See if it isn't," said his wife, smilingly placing the child before him. "Doesn't she look better?"

"Better! why, I can hardly believe my own eyes. Look here, John," he called out to his man, "who do you guess this is?"

"Um!" growled John, putting his head in at the door, "any body 'd know where them big, snaky eyes come from; but she does look a powerful site better, though."

Meanwhile Nell stood half-frightened, half-pleased with the unwonted notice she received, when something in John's face seemed to strike her fancy, and she sprang towards him, saying eagerly:

"Do *you* like me?'

"Can't say I do; though I han't nothin' pertic'ler agin *you*," he replied, turning away.

She understood the movement rather than his words, but she was not to be baffled so.

"Won't you like me if I'll be good?" she urged, with an appealing look.

"Don't think I could; you've got too much of the old infarnal blood in ye," was John's rough answer as he left the house. But away in one corner of his heart lingered that earnest, childish entreaty, and the sad, beseeching look of those "great eyes."

"Nobody likes me," said she, looking up pitifully at John's abrupt departure.

"Be a good girl, and you will find friends enough," Mrs. Jepson replied encouragingly; then turning to her husband, she said in a low voice: "I did not think the child was so sensitive. What will she do at school, where the scholars will be almost sure to make sport of her?"

"Gim-i-*ni!* she'd tear their eyes out," he laughingly replied; "but I'll see to it. I'll go myself with her this afternoon. There's nothing like beginning right, especially when we've got a hard case like this on hand."

It was well for that poor frightened child that a strong arm and kind heart were near to shield her from the scrutiny, and perchance ridicule, of scores of bright eyes that peeped at her from over books and around benches as she entered that dreaded tribunal, the village school-room.

It was well that she could shrink from their mischievous glances behind *such* a protector, else her first impulse to rush from the scene might have been obeyed and her mind left in its ignorance and darkness forever.

But the Doctor held her little, trembling hand firmly in his great palm as he approached the teacher:

"I've brought you a new scholar," said he, "and a nice little gal she is, too."

A scarcely suppressed titter ran around the room as Nell stoutly resisted his efforts to draw her forward.

"Never mind," he added pleasantly, "let her be a

few minutes; she'll come to, soon. Now let's see how well these little gals can spell. I shall have some nice, plump cherries by and by to give to some body."

This adroit movement soon brought a row of sparkling eyes before him, and in their eager emulation Nell and her fears were forgotten.

"Gim-i-*ni!*" exclaimed the Doctor when they concluded, "every one o' my cherries are gone, certain; now which of you wants to be the best gal in school?"

"I—I—I," echoed on all sides.

"Ha! ha! ha!" he laughed, patting Nell's head, who had unconsciously crept forward in her eagerness to listen, "they're all going to be best; but you'll beat 'em all yet, chick. I'll risk her now," he added, turning to the teacher. "These little gals and boys, too, would rather catch the measles any time than to treat her bad; jest let me know, though, if any of 'em do, for she's my gal now, and I'm going to take care of her."

He went out, leaving Nell standing half-irresolute in the middle of the floor.

Upon what a seemingly trivial point does our destiny sometimes turn! One harsh, discordant breath would have extinguished forever the feeble light glimmering in that child's breast; one look could have sent her forth irreclaimably lost. But a gentle hand was laid upon her, a soft voice spoke soothingly in her ear, and—*Nell was saved!*

CHAPTER XII.

"The human heart!—the sigh for sin
Is music to thy perfect ear,
And earth has naught thy glance to win
Like that returning wanderer's tear."

"What are you standin' there for, starin' at me so, with them great eyes o' yourn?" said John, rather roughly, as Nell stood wistfully watching him at his work one day.

"I'm learning to read and be good," and she timidly moved a little nearer, raising her eyes beseechingly; "don't you love me now?"

John struck his shovel into the earth, and began to scratch his head; "Consarn it, I never was hard-hearted afore—if she warn't that confounded old witch's darter; but there, what's the use o' worrying *her;* 'tan't likely she's to blame ——"

"Say, John," continued the little pleader; "won't you love me, if I'll drive the cows, and help you work ever so much?"

"Yes, blast it," cried John, brushing something very like a tear-drop from his eye; "'tan't no sort o' use to stan' out so agin nater, and my heart has kept a warmin'

towards her ever sence she come. Yes Nell, here's my hand on't; we're friends now;" and he grasped her little brown hand in his own hard palm."

"Oh! I'm so glad!" shouted Nell, her face irradiated with a smile which made her look absolutely beautiful; "and you'll love mammy too, won't you?"

"Can't do that, no how," muttered John, shaking his head; "'tan't my duty to nuther. Why, child, your mammy's a miserable old witch that sets every body by the ears, and makes more trouble'n she's worth."

Nell's whole manner changed as he spoke—her black eye flashed, her little bosom heaved, and she stamped her foot in anger. "You shan't say so about my mammy," she cried; "if you do, I'll run away and I'll hate you, I will."

"Ha! ha! ha! what a furse little critter you be," said John, laughing; "you're the only one that'll stan' up so for Esther Cram, I reckon; but I s'pose it's kind o' nat'ral, bein's you're her own blood."

The half-defiant mood with which Nell listened to him seemed to soften somewhat as John ceased, and she asked with an earnestness which almost startled him· "What makes you hate my mammy so?"

"You an't old enough to understand about it, child," John replied kindly; "but she's made me pesky miserable, that's a fact."

A sudden thought seemed to flash through Nell's mind and she caught his hand eagerly. "Come 'long a me," said she.

"Where 'bouts?" John asked with surprise.

"Up there; come;" and she pulled him along with a most determined look.

John could not resist his curiosity to know what the child meant, and so he suffered her to lead him on. But when they came to the foot of the mountain and she began to ascend rapidly, he drew back, exclaiming: "You don't ketch me up to the Devil's Crag, now, I tell ye."

"Come," she reïterated most authoritatively, summoning all her strength to force him along.

"What an infarnal grip you've got! I won't stir another step I tell ye up that way;" and John stubbornly sat himself down upon a stone.

"Afore I'd be so 'fraid;" exclaimed Nell, pointing her finger contemptuously at him.

It was evident that hers was the stronger nature, for John began to yield at once as he replied in an undecided tone: "'Tan't 'cause I'm afeard, I'd have ye to know."

"Come along then," said she, without waiting for him to finish his sentence; and half-ashamed of himself, John followed her with a sheepish look, muttering: "'Tis the witch's blood that's in her; a feller can't seem to stan' out agin' that, no way."

Silently they went up the rugged path, Nell keeping firm hold of her companion's hand, that he might not escape her, and John hanging his head as if he were committing some foolish act. Thus they reached the

hut, the door of which Nell pushed open, and drew her reluctant visitor in.

Esther Cram sat crouched over some dying embers, upon her rude hearth—her hollow eye and trembling form bearing witness to the dread conflict through which she had passed, and which had not ceased its raging within her breast. With a harsh exclamation she sprang to her feet, and approached the intruders.

"What sends you here?" she sharply asked; then as her eye fell upon her child, it softened with the instinct of maternal love. "I thought you had left me, Nell;" her voice was almost broken with emotion now; "has the world's cold breath chilled you *so soon*, and driven you back to the warm shelter of a mother's love? What is it you want—speak child;" she added, as Nell seemed struggling to say something.

"Make *him* love you, mammy," cried the child pointing towards John; "he hates you, he does."

Esther Cram turned her piercing eye full upon John, who stood twisting his old hat in his hands, with a most uncomfortable quaking sensation about his heart.

"Who are you?" she demanded.

John hemmed and haw-ed; "Why, you see Mrs. Cram," he began; "this 'ere little gal o' yourn ——"

"What's your name?" she abruptly interrupted.

"Hawkin's, ma'am; my name's John Hawkins; I live long o' the doctor down yonder, where your little gal is a stayin' now."

"Well?" The fortune-teller did not move her eyes from his face as she thus interrogated him.

"Wal, as I was a sayin', this 'ere little gal o' yourn made me come up here with her wher'er or no, and so I come; but I ax your pardon ma'am, and hope I don't intrude."

"Make him love you, mammy," persisted Nell; "he shan't like me if you don't. He says you hurt him."

"What's that?" exclaimed Esther Cram, coming nearer to John, who was now most thoroughly frightened at his own audacity in thus bearding the lion in its den.

"Why, you see, ma'am," he tremblingly answered; "'twas all along o' that Nell there, and she's a plaguey smart gal too, that I kind o' blurted out sumthin' about that matter o' Molly's, and then she kept a pullin' and a pullin' me, till she got me clean up here; but 'tan't worth while to stay long I reckon. I guess I'd better be a goin' now."

"Stop," said Esther Cram; "what do you mean by that matter of 'Molly's,' and what have I to do with it?"

"Molly Lawson 'twas; she that was to be my—wal, no matter, I can't speak it now, no how." John almost forgot his fear in the recollection of his wrongs.

"But I command you to speak," said the fortune-teller sternly; "if there has been any wrong it shall be righted for my child's sake. You have been kind to her, I know, or she would not thus bring you to me. Let me prove then that a mother's heart will respond to such a plea when all others fail. How can I befriend you?"

"'Tan't no use," John gloomily replied; "Molly's head's clean turned with them enticing words o' yourn."

Esther Cram began to have a dim perception of the truth. "If I have been the means of robbing an honest fellow like you of a good wife," said she, "I am sorry. But the girl must have been a vain, silly thing, to have listened to me if she really loved you—better let her go, I say."

"I won't hear a word agin' Molly no how," John vehemently exclaimed; "she's the nicest gal there is in these diggin's. 'Tan't none o' her fault that she wouldn't yoke up 'long such a feller as me, when you promised her a real smart rich one."

The fortune-teller's heart smote her, as she thought of all the misery her false idle words had brought to many a family, and her compassion was excited for the poor fellow before her, who had evidently suffered much through her influence.

"You are right John," said she kindly; "and you have an honest true heart, which Molly will yet learn to prize more highly than any rich husband I could bring her, even if I had the power. Go back to your work now, and depend upon it, if you'll go round and see Molly this evening, she'll have something to say to you which will gladden your heart."

John drew his coarse sleeve across his eyes and stammered. "I've said some dreffful hard things agin' you, Miss Cram, but if you'll only bring Molly back to me, I'll sarve ye as long as I live, that I will."

"Well, go now;" Esther Cram waved her hand towards the door as she spoke; "'twill be time enough to hear your thanks when they're deserved. Nell," she cried, catching her child by the arm; "you may trust him: go."

Silently as they had come up thither, hand in hand the two descended the mountain; Nell casting, now and then, wistful glances into her companion's face, as if to read what was written there. But John, absorbed in his own thoughts, forgot even her presence, and as his steps quickened, he began to mutter aloud. "Confound it, I bleve I'm bewitched too, or else I shouldn't a taken such a likin' to the old critter herself. I allers did hate her; but then I never knowed nothin' 'bout her afore. I don't blame Molly one mite now for believin' every word she said. Wal, I reckon I shan't git them taters dug in a hurry; I feel so kind o' strange like."

"I'll help ye," Nell promptly responded as she caught the last sentence.

"You! consarn it, I forgot you was here—what have I bin a sayin'? Wal, never mind, it's all 'long o' you, that I come up here, and if your marm does—now mind what I say, child—if your marm does bring Molly back to her senses, you shan't never lose nothin' by it, now I tell ye."

"I don't want nothin' if you'll only love me and mammy."

"Wouldn't you like though, Nell, to come and see

me and Molly if we do git hitched together, and taste some o' that nice 'lasses cake Molly makes, eh?" and John's rough face fairly glistened with happy anticipations.

"Oh! I'm so glad!" cried Nell, catching the inspiration, as she gayly skipped over the wall, into the field from whence she had dragged John away.

"Look here!" shouted Dr. Jepson, coming up just at that moment panting for breath; "what does all this mean! I've been hunting after you, John, for an hour at least. Where has this little gipsy been spiriting you away to, eh?"

John hung his head silently, but Nell boldly answered: "We've been up to mammy's, and she's gone to do somethin' real nice to make him love her."

"Ha! ha! ha! gim-i-*ni*, if that an't a good one! been a sparking crazy Esther, eh, John? want to get a little nearer related to the 'old boy,' do you?"

"I don't calkilate to be laughed at," John retorted fiercely, striding off to his work at the other end of the field.

"Stop a minute, John," the Doctor shouted after him, but John was too thoroughly disturbed to heed the command. "Gim-i-*ni*, I believe the fellow has gone crazy himself. Come Nell, tell me what ails him, if you can," he good-naturedly added.

"Mammy's gon' to make Molly Lawson like him, and then he says he'll love me and mammy too—won't that be nice?" Nell replied with innocent earnestness.

"Ah! that's it, is it? well, 'tis enough to turn the poor fellow's head, if Esther Cram has made him believe she can do that, for he sets a sight o' store by Molly. I wouldn't have twitted him so, if I had known. But come, let's go up to the house and see what Betsy can do for him—she knows how to manage such things better than I do. I shouldn't wonder now if it ended in a wedding after all."

When Esther Cram had watched the last footsteps of her rough visitor as he departed, leading her child by the hand, she turned to her lonely hut, with a feeling of isolation such as she had never before experienced. It was as if she had seen the line of demarkation drawn deep and broad, which shut her out from the world and its sympathies, even from her own flesh and blood. Serious misgivings almost for the first time crossed her mind, as to her *right* thus to blot out a life God had given. A long and fearful account of wasted days stood out in bold relief before her; ay, worse than wasted! for they had been filled with folly and wickedness, whose bitter streams had quenched the light of many a happy, peaceful household. What if the dire record *should* at at last be brought into judgment against her! Where through the long, dark vista of the past, could she point to one spot brightened by the memory of a holy deed?

Alas! to her the past seemed like some vast cavern from out whose black vaults sounds of misery and woe echoed and reëchoed their hideous strains, checked by

no soft tones of love and peace. As if written with a pen of fire, the sins and errors of her life shone forth with startling distinctness, while from behind the blazing characters, a mighty voice seemed to breathe forth these words: "Redeem it while thou canst." Like an electric shock, it thrilled through her frame, waking her to a sudden energy of purpose—changing in the twinkling of an eye, the aimless remnant of her existence, to active *propitiatory* service.

Sudden as was the transformation, Esther Cram seemed almost intuitively to comprehend the work before her; and for her, *to know, was to do.* Hastily throwing a faded and worn shawl over her ragged garments, and covering her uncombed locks with an old hood, she traced with quick steps the familiar path which led down through the woods, over fields and lanes, to the only door which had ever opened to her in kindness and sympathy.

Great was Mrs. Jepson's surprise when without warning the fortune-teller came into the room where she was sitting, and in an unwonted gentle manner told her of the great struggle through which she had just passed, and her final triumph.

"My prayers are answered!" she exclaimed, when Esther Cram concluded her wonderful relation; "ever since you told me your history, Mrs. Cram, I have had strong faith that you would yet be brought to the light. Oh! how marvelous are the ways of the Lord! They are indeed 'past finding out!'"

"I must be taught, I must be guided," Esther Cram replied with child-like meekness; "will you lead me in the right way?—you, who first pointed me thence, and who alone, of all the world, have cared for my soul."

"Most gladly, most thankfully, will I do all in my power to help you on, Mrs. Cram; but first of all, you must seek and obtain strength from the only source whence it can come; you must pray that the blessed Spirit may enlighten you in your duty."

"Pray for me, Mrs. Jepson; I dare not offer one petition from such a guilty heart as mine!" Esther Cram tremblingly exclaimed.

"Together, then, we'll bend before that mercy-seat," said Mrs. Jepson, taking the fortune-teller's withered hand tenderly in her own, and side by side they knelt with bowed heads, while with earnest trembling tones, at times almost lost in the intensity of her emotions, this lowly Christian plead a sister's cause.

With what an enraptured gaze do angels witness such a scene! How jubilant the strains in which they herald forth the joyful news of one repentant sinner's birth! How sweet the refrain those heavenly melodies awake within that *pardoned* sinner's breast!

A light of almost celestial radiance shone upon the poor, worn, shriveled features of the fortune-teller, as she arose from her knees and exclaimed: "My burden is gone from me! I am pardoned! I am saved! Now shall the remnant of my life be spent for Him who has thus freed me from my terrible thraldom to sin!"

CHAPTER XIII.

"We met, and we parted in rudeness and grief,
But we loved each other beyond belief:
I lived in the garret and she in the kitchen,
And love was all that we both were rich in."

Late in the afternoon of the day on which the incidents in the preceding chapter occurred, Molly Lawson sat in her straight high-backed chair, in the tidiest of all kitchens, busily intent upon her favorite knitting-work, while the clicking sound of the polished needles, as they flew in and out with astonishing rapidity, formed a pleasant accompaniment to her solitary thoughts. Bolt upright she sat, prim, precise, automatic in her movements, a maiden of some thirty-five summers, with here and there a crow's mark on her sallow face, and silvery streaks among her thin locks. Whatever claims to beauty she might have made in her younger days, none surely could have been granted to her fading years; but Molly had a *heart*, often hid, to be sure, beneath the sickly sentimental rubbish with which her weak head was filled; but after all, 'twas a heart which

could appreciate genuine worth and be true and loyal, if left to its own instincts. Like many other weak minds, Molly had a strong penchant for the marvelous; no story too wonderful for her credulity, no prophecy too absurd for her to question.

It was not strange therefore that when Esther Cram, in whose oracular power she had the most implicit confidence, predicted for her "a rich and gallant lover from over the sea," it should have shaken her allegiance to such a rude, uncouth person as John. But could he have seen what it cost her to repress her honest love for him, John would have pitied rather than blamed her.

Whether Molly had become wearied with waiting for her promised brilliant destiny, we can not affirm; but we do know that on the afternoon referred to, her heart was more than usually softened towards her old rough lover, and that often the renewed swiftness of her needles was but the response to quickened thought within. It was with the most intense satisfaction, therefore, that she saw the fortune-teller approach and enter her door.

"Laws sakes, Miss Cram!" she exclaimed, pushing a chair towards her visitor; "you don't know nothin' how glad I be to see ye. I was jest a sayin' only this mornin' to Judith Pease, 'Judy,' said I to her, 'what on airth do you s'pose has come o' that fortin'-teller? I han't seen her this age;' and Judy said as how she guessed likely you hadn't been in these parts lately; she'd heerd tell that you'd gone off, since your little gal

got to livin' 'long o' the Doctor's folks. But, goodness gracious me! what's the matter with ye? You don't look one mite like yourself;" and Molly dropped her knitting-work in her lap, to await the answer.

"If I don't look like myself," said Esther Cram with a smile—the first Molly had ever seen on her face—"it only proves the intimate connection between the mind and body; for I am not 'myself' as you have always known me, Molly."

"Ma'am," said Molly, with a puzzled, incredulous stare.

"It isn't strange that you don't comprehend me," Esther Cram replied kindly; "I am changed, Molly, greatly changed, since you saw me last. I have been made to see and feel the wickedness of my life; and now, God helping me, I must try to repair some of the wrongs I have committed against my fellow-beings."

"Wal, I'm sure! if ever I did! Why, Miss Cram, you don't mean to say you've met with a reformation, do you?" Molly exclaimed in unfeigned astonishment.

"I don't know what you call it, Molly, but I have come to the determination to lead a very different life. I have been a poor, miserable, misguided woman, deceived myself and deceiving others; but, thank heaven, it isn't too late to repent."

"You an't goin' to give up fortin'-telling, be ye, Miss Cram?"

"That I am, Molly; I've caused misery enough by that wicked delusion."

"O Lud! you don't mean to say you don't believe in it now," cried Molly, with an eagerness which showed how much she had at stake.

"It is all a lie, Molly—a wicked lie; we can none of us tell what shall happen in the future."

"And you got my money away, and didn't tell me the truth after all! and I lost John besides!" Molly passionately exclaimed, holding her apron to her eyes and beginning to cry.

"Your money shall be returned to you, Molly, and you needn't lose John either, unless you choose to," Esther Cram replied encouragingly; "he has been constant and true to you through all. I am sorry I deceived you so, but even if I had the power to make my words true, you would never find a husband more faithful than your old lover."

"O dear! O dear!" sobbed Molly; "I never can look John in the face agin' as long as I live; I know he thinks I'm a desput silly gal; but I allers did like him, only I kind o' thought 'twould be so nice to have such a mighty grand husband, and so many new gowns and a carriage to ride in, and all that. 'Twas only yesterday I was a sayin' to Judy: 'Judy,' sed I to her, 'when I do get all them nice things, you shall come and live 'long o' me, and won't we be ladies then?' O dear! somehow I don't care nothin' 'bout that now, if I was only sure John didn't hate me. Judy said to me t'other day, says she to me: 'Molly Lawson, that are John

Hawkins worships the very ground you tread on;' but laws sakes, I know [redacted]en better'n she does; she han't never had a spark yet, and I've had—oh! I don't know nothin' how many—three sartin."

Molly's volubility provoked a smile upon Esther Cram's face. "You are in no danger of being left alone then, Molly," said she; "but let me advise you to become reconciled to John without delay, if he seeks it. Poor fellow! he has suffered enough now."

"If John Hawkins wants to make up 'long o' me, jest let him come and tell me so, that's all I have to say," Molly curtly replied, straightening herself up in her chair and making the needles fly again through her stocking; "but I must say I don't think much o' folks as spends their whole life leadin' their feller-critters astray, and then, arter all, comes rite round and tells 'em 'tis all a lie."

"I deserve your reproaches, Molly," Esther Cram mildly answered; "but you wouldn't think quite so hard of me, I know, if I should tell you all the cruel, bitter sufferings which led me on to such a life."

"Laws sakes, Miss Cram, I didn't mean nothin'; I'm kind o' flusturcated, that's all; I han't nothin' agin you now. Set down—don't be in sich a hurry; how's your little gal gittin' along?"

"I scarcely know myself; I have given Nell up to those who wish to teach her."

"I sh'd think you'd be mighty thankful to 'em too—

she's a plaguey smart gal, that Nell is. I told Judy t'other day, sed I to her: 'Judy, that are Wild Nell 'll be the smartest gal in town yet, see ef she an't.'"

"I hope she will lead a more useful life than her mother has done," said Esther Cram, rising to go; "but the night is coming on, and I have a long walk before me. Do not forget what I have said, Molly, and may you be guided aright."

Molly sat lost in thought for some time after Esther Cram left her, with her hands dropped listlessly upon the neglected work in her lap and her head resting upon one of the posts of her chair. It was a new thing for her to idle away even a half-hour, for she prided herself on being a notable thrifty housekeeper, which in truth she was. But dreams and castle-building for once superseded her usual industry, and so Molly dreamt on, oblivious to all external surroundings, till the shadows of evening crept in, and wrapt their sable folds around her.

The heavy tramp of a familiar step approaching, suddenly brought back her scattered senses, and caused her to spring quickly from her chair towards the mantlepiece, where stood a solitary candle, which, after she had raked from the bed of ashes a live coal, she tried, by vigorous puffing and blowing, to light. But something seemed to have possessed the new white wick, for she puffed and blew in vain; not a spark could she elicit—and the steps drew nearer and nearer; the latch was lifted, while still on the hearth she knelt in the

darkness, her breath coming thick and short, in spasmodic efforts to ignite the stubborn candle.

"Jest le'm me try that," said a voice, which sent the blood rushing up to the very roots of her hair; "I reckon I can help ye a little;" and John, with a steadier breath than hers, though scarcely less agitated, soon caused the dim light to shine on her red face.

"La, what a handy critter you be, Mr. Hawkins," said she, placing the candle on a light-stand near, and seating herself upon an old-fashioned settle in the chimney-corner; "set down, won't ye? Ye're a great stranger, seems to me."

"I'm in a kind o' hurry," John replied, twisting his great hands nervously; "but I guess I may as well stay a minit or two, if you've no objections;" and he sat down in the high-backed chair opposite Molly.

An awkward silence ensued, which was at length broken by John, who said, with a laugh: "Seems to me you've got a new notion o' settin' up in the dark. I kind o' thought you warn't tu hum, when I didn't see no light round; warn't asleep, was ye?"

"Wal, I shouldn't wonder a mite ef I was; 'cause I don't remember nothin' arter Miss Cram went away till I heerd you a comin'." Molly's needles flew faster than ever as she spoke.

"Blast me, if I don't think you're the smartest gal I ever did see, Molly!" exclaimed John, unable to contain himself any longer; "I don't blame ye, one mite, I don't, for not takin' up 'long o' sich a feller as I be."

He could not have hit upon a surer way to mollify her.

"There, John Hawkins," said she, "don't you never say no sich thing as that agin; I an't a mite better'n you be, now."

"Yes you be, and you know it, Molly. But I kind o' wish you hadn't bluffed me off so. You won't never get another feller that'll like you better'n I do, that's flat."

"Mebbe I will and mebbe I won't, and mebbe I don't want to," said Molly, tossing her head coquettishly.

"Consarn it, I can't stan' this no longer;" and John made an awkward plunge on to the settle, by the side of Molly. "There, now, Molly Lawson, ef you do like me, say so, and ef ye don't, say so; my feelin's has been harrered up long enuf. Come, now, le's agree to hitch together and say no more 'bout it, will ye?"

Molly did not move away, when John put his arm coaxingly around her waist, as he spoke. "If I only knowed you didn't think bad on me, 'cause I treated you so," she sobbed, covering her face with her apron.

"Oh poh! I never blamed you none, Molly; 'twas all that confounded old witch's work, and I knowed it. Any gal would a been mighty crank to git sich a feller as she telled on."

"'Tan't no sich a thing," cried Molly, now wholly subdued; "I'd ruther have you, John, than any feller she could shake her stick at. There, now, I han't told

no lie, and I an't ashamed on't nuther;" and she laid her head on his broad shoulder, while John, overjoyed, threw his other arm around her, and held her firm in his vice-like grasp.

"Consarn it!" he exclaimed, while two great tears started from their sockets, "ef I don't feel jest as if I's in heaven! Look a' here, Molly, you jest say that agin; I'm plaguey afeerd I'm dreamin' arter all."

"Ye an't dreamin' nuther, John, an' I jest's lives tell ye agin as not, 'cause I know I've treated ye awful bad, but your little finger's worth more to me than all the fellers in the world; 'tis, an' so there." Molly raised her face, glowing with honest, enthusiastic love, while John, completely crazed with the certainty of his bliss, sealed her words with a smack which made the walls of the old kitchen ring.

"There, now," said he, "le's have the minister fix this thing rite up, won't we, Molly?"

"Goodness gracious, John, what a hurry you be in," Molly replied with a smile, which showed that the suggestion was far from displeasing to her; "an't afraid o' losin' on me agin, be ye?"

"Wal, 'tan't that 'zactly," said John, scratching his head, "though I sh'd feel a plaguey site worse'n ever I did; but somehow or nuther it'll seem dredful lonesome-like round without you now."

"Laws sakes, how you men allers do talk! Wal, I han't nothin' agin it, as I knows on. As I was a sayin' to Judith Pease t'other day: 'Judy,' sed I to her, 'my

linen is all spun and my comfortables is all made; so ef I du take a notion to git married in a hurry, there won t be nothin' to do.'"

"Then I'm goin' rite over to the parson's to-night, and we'll git published and spliced quicker'n no time," said John, putting on his hat and giving Molly another rousing salute.

"O Lud! if ever I did," soliloquized Molly, as she listened to her lover's retreating footsteps, shuffling away in eager haste towards the minister's. "These men do beat all nater; that John Hawkins, now, don't know nothin' whether he's on his head or his heels. Wal, I can't say much; I feel kind o' all overish myself. Le'm me see—jest two weeks come Sunday night and I shan't be Molly Lawson no longer. Heigho! wal, mebbe I might do better, and then agin I might do a mighty site worse. John's a real clever, honest feller, as I's a tellin' Judy t'other day, and I an't one grain afeard to jine my fate long o' his'n."

CHAPTER XIV.

"To-morrow is a day too far
To trust, whate'er the day be.
We know, a little, what we are,
But who knows what we may be?"

In a quiet little village like that of B——, where each one was as conversant with his neighbor's affairs as his own, a change so great and marvelous in one whom they had long supposed given over to the dominion of evil spirits, could not escape immediate notice, and Esther Cram soon found herself surrounded with kind-hearted friends, whose proffers of sympathy, as well as more substantial aid, gave additional brightness to the new life she had found. Recalling the use of her needle, in which, in her early years, she had been a great proficient, it was not long ere she began to reap the pleasant fruits of a life of honest industry. Content, serene and peaceful, arched its bow of promise over her dark horizon, and shed its halo on the coming path of her declining years.

Scarcely less momentous in its effects upon her future was this wonderful transformation to Nell. Following

quickly, as it did, upon her own just awakened perceptions, it gave an impressiveness, a reality to life ever after stamped upon her heart. To see her mother clothed and in her right mind, to hear her voice in tones of prayer and praise, to watch her going about doing good, undoing the evil she had wrought, was to Nell a mystery so incomprehensible that her little brain reeled and staggered in its vain attempts to solve the matter.

"Please, ma'am," said she to her teacher one day after she had been more than usually thoughtful, "what makes mammy do so?"

"What is it, Nellie?" asked Miss Howard kindly, smoothing her black hair, now neatly combed.

Nellie looked up confidently into the face of her teacher, that face in which she had never read any thing but patience and gentleness. "My mammy's most as good as you be now," she said. "What makes her be so?"

Miss Howard smiled.

"Your mother is greatly changed, Nellie. Are you not very glad?"

"I guess I be!" exclaimed Nellie earnestly. "She helps me git my lessons now, and she says I may go to school till I'm a great big girl. Who made her say so?"

"'Tis God, my child, who has changed her heart and made her feel so differently from what she used to. I hope you will learn to love him, too, Nellie."

"Does he love me?"

"He loves all good little girls, but he does not like to have them show such a naughty, angry temper as you do sometimes. Will you not try to be good all the time, so that he may love you always?"

"I'd rather have you love me, 'cause I can see you and hear you talk," Nellie replied with innocent earnestness. "I don't know God."

"But he knows you, Nellie, better than I do. He knows what you are thinking about every moment, and he sees every thing you do. Remember that, my child, the next time you take up a stone to throw it, or raise your hand to strike any of your little playmates."

"They call me bad names, and my mammy, too," said Nell, with the old flash in her eye. "I won't let 'em; see if I do."

"It is very wrong in them to do so, Nellie; but you must not be naughty because they are. I'll tell you what to do. The next time any of them call you or your mother names, you just go up to them and speak kindly, and tell them how bad it makes you feel, and how God is looking right into their hearts and sees every thing they think or do. I don't believe they would trouble you any more if they found they could not make you angry. They like to see you stamp your foot and act so wild; but it grieves me very much, my child, when I see you in such a passion. Will you not try, for my sake, to be more kind and gentle?"

"I'd do any thing *you* want me to, 'cause I like you,

oh! so much!" Nell's warm, passionate nature glowed in her face as she spoke.

"And I love you, Nellie," said Miss Howard, drawing the little girl tenderly towards her and kissing her brown cheek; you are one of my very best scholars now, and a good girl, too. But come, 'tis time for school to begin. Remember what I have told you, and you will find yourself much happier. Stop a moment; I want to say one thing more. When you speak of your mother, you must not call her 'mammy,' as you used to when you lived on the mountain. You are learning better things now, I hope. You must call her *mother*."

"So I will," said Nell. "It sounds better, don't it?" and she went towards her desk in a sort of brown study, which gave to her naturally grave face an expression of thoughtfulness beyond her years.

'Twas wonderful to see the magic change wrought in that face when, an hour later, Dr. Jepson came bustling into the school-room "just to see how his little gal got along," as he said. A beautiful bright smile dimpled her cheeks, and her speaking eye told more eloquently than words with what reverent fondness she regarded her kind benefactor.

"That's right, that's right," said the Doctor, nodding complacently at her. "Bright and cheery as a cricket, an't you? Come, Miss Howard, now let's see who can beat our Nell. Gim-i-*ni!* she steps as proud

as a queen," he added, in a whisper, to the teacher as Nell came forward and took her place with her class.

"She is a remarkable child," Miss Howard replied in the same tone.

Nell's quick, active mind, albeit destitute of early culture, shone conspicuously by the side of her more obtuse companions, and the good Doctor congratulated himself again and again upon the happy results of his efforts to educate her.

"Gim-i-*ni!*" said he when they had concluded their recitations and stood, a row of smiling faces before him, awaiting his approval, "you're a parcel of the smartest boys and gals I've seen this good while. Likely as not some of you'll be President yet; who knows? But I don't see but what my little gal there is about as smart as any of you. I hope she's as good, too; how is it, Bobby?"

"I don' know, sir," Bobby Brown replied hesitatingly, looking around at each one as he spoke; "she strikes us sometimes, and throws stones at us."

"That's 'cause you call me bad names," said Nell, stepping quickly forward and angrily confronting her accuser; then, as her teacher's words flashed across her mind, she dropped her eyes and added, with touching humility: "but I know I was real naughty, and I won't do it again."

This unexpected confession, so frankly and ingenuously made, opened their childish hearts at once.

"I don't think you're half so bad as I be," said one.

"Any body'd a-done just so," said another.

"I don't think we ought to plague her so," added a third, and so on through the whole class, each one eager to take the blame from Nell when they saw her so humble and repentant.

"Well done!" exclaimed the Doctor, laughing and crying all at once; "you're a brave set, certain. Come here, Nellie; you're a noble gal, too, to confess your faults so frankly. Gim-i-*ni!* that was worth a thousand dollars, certain. Miss Howard, you ought to be proud of such scholars, and they ought to be thankful for a teacher who has evidently taught them something besides their lessons."

Nellie laid her head on her pillow that night with the determination to obey all her teacher's counsels, and to try, by kindness and gentleness, to win the love of her schoolmates. Happy in the anticipated delight such a result would bring to her little craving heart, she fell into a soft slumber, while still the smile lingered on her lips, as if some angel were breathing its own joyful life into hers.

Thus as she lay in the sound, refreshing sleep of childhood, her light breath scarce stirring the covering upon her breast, a step softly approached her little cot, and a hand was gently laid upon her unconscious brow.

"Come here, Lydia," said Mrs. Jepson in a low voice, beckoning her hand towards the door, "see how

beautifully she smiles in her sleep. You can not call her ugly now, can you?"

"Why, how wrapt up you are in that child, Betsy," Mrs. Waters replied, in the same tone, as she came towards the bed; "I verily believe you love her as well as if she were your own. But she does really look pretty in repose — much prettier than when that little fiery temper of hers is aroused and her black eyes snap and flash as if they would pierce you through and through. I fear she will be a terrible trial to you yet, unless her spirit can be subdued."

"She is a child to be governed by love rather than fear," said Mrs. Jepson, gazing fondly at the little sleeper; "she is the most sensitive little thing I ever saw. One word of affection or endearment will bend her to your will in a moment, while a harsh look even has often made her almost wild with passion. 'Tis a fearful responsibility, I know, to train such a being, and my whole nature shrank from it at first. But my duty seemed too clearly pointed out for me to raise a question or refuse the cross. It is bringing its reward even now, for Nellie has become very dear to me, and her poor, degraded mother, who seemed almost beyond the pale of hope, has been led, as I trust, by these influences into a new life. I can scarcely credit the evidence of my own senses when I see the wonderful change there is in her."

"Well, Betsy, your mission always seemed to be

doing good to others, and I don't see but you are as likely to fulfill it up here in these wilds as elsewhere. But what could have induced you first to select such unpromising objects for your charity as this child and her mother?" Mrs. Waters asked with interest.

"Come down-stairs with me, and I will tell you," replied her sister stooping to kiss her little charge, and taking the candle in her hand she led the way to the sitting-room.

"Mr. Everson's illness, as you know," she began when they had seated themselves, "first brought them to our immediate notice, though Esther Cram's name had long been a terror to the neighborhood. The Doctor became quite interested in her wild, uncouth child, although he did not have much faith in the practicability of educating her as Mr. Everson desired, and for which he left a generous sum; and I was equally averse to the project. But he had given his promise that he would do all in his power towards it, and therefore I endeavored to aid him in the matter. For a long time Esther Cram thwarted our efforts; but at length Nell's importunity prevailed, and her mother gave her up to my charge. It was a severe trial to me at first, as you may well imagine; but oftentimes such trials prove in the end our greatest blessings, and I have no doubt it will be so in this case."

"I hope it may," said Mrs. Waters; "but I must confess to the very common weakness of judging peo-

ple somewhat by their antecedents. In that view your *protégé* would not seem very promising, would she?"

"I don't know about that, Lydia. Esther Cram belonged to one of the best families in your own city, and her early years were spent in good society. It is very evident from her language, that she had an excellent education, though that seems to be the only trace left of it."

"What do you mean, Betsy?" Mrs. Waters exclaimed with astonishment; "not that miserable old fortune-teller?"

"Hers is a strange history, indeed," Mrs. Jepson replied; "to-morrow you shall hear it from her own lips, and then you will not wonder at my interest in them both."

"Are you sure she has not deceived you, Betsy? It is scarcely credible that such a degraded creature as she has been, came from a good family."

"Here comes the Doctor; ask him," said Mrs. Jepson as her husband's good-natured, jovial face appeared within the door.

"What's that, Lyddy?" said he throwing off his hat and coat, and settling himself down in a comfortable arm-chair.

"Your wife has been telling me some strange things about Nellie's mother," said she. "Can it be possible that the woman's story about her parentage is true?"

"There's no doubt about it," the Doctor replied de-

cidedly. "Esther Cram can show as good an ancestry as you or I. How she could have kept it to herself so long, is a mystery to me; she's a strange being, certain, but I guess she's coming out all right now."

"She has caused a great deal of trouble by her fortune-telling," added Mrs. Jepson; "but she seems to be very anxious to repair the mischief she has done."

"If she succeeds as well in every case as she has in John's," said the Doctor, laughing, "she'll make some friends here yet, I reckon. Gim-i-*ni!* you ought to see how happy he and Molly are since they come together. I dropped in there just now, as I came along, and they both set to praising the old fortune-teller as if she was a saint. I was glad enough to hear it, for I've got a notion in my head that we'd better get them to come into the little cottage over here and live with Esther Cram. What do you say to that, wife?"

"I think it would be an excellent plan," Mrs. Jepson warmly replied; "but I do not believe Mrs. Cram could be persuaded to desert her mountain home entirely. She has a very deep and strong attachment to the spot where she has spent so much of her life."

"She can go up there as often as she pleases," the Doctor rejoined; "but I reckon a civilized sort of life will suit her best now. I'll do my duty about it at any rate, and then she can take her choice. There'll be no harm in that, certain."

"I do hope you will not find your generous kindness misplaced," said Mrs. Waters in a doubtful tone; "the world is full of ingratitude and deception."

"Never fear, Lyddy," the Doctor replied with an earnestness which showed the depth and sincerity of his heart, "we have got to learn to do our duty whether we meet with good or evil in return. It is a poor kind of charity that never trusts. For my part, I'd rather be deceived in fifty cases than to lose the chance of doing good to one poor soul. But as for Esther Cram and our little Nell, I haven't the slightest fear but what we shall receive far more than we give."

"Well, all I have to say," replied Mrs. Waters, smiling, "is, that if you do succeed in making any thing out of the wild child, you will be entitled to the gratitude of the whole village. I do not believe any one else would have undertaken such a hopeless task."

"We shall succeed, sister," exclaimed Mrs. Jepson. "I can already see signs of promise that fill me with hope and confidence."

"That we shall," confidently added the Doctor, "for I never knew my wife undertake any thing she didn't accomplish. She has a strange knack of knowing just the right thing to do, and a heart that will never stop short of doing her whole duty."

"And a husband," rejoined Mrs. Jepson affectionately, "whose example often causes her to blush for her own failings while vainly striving to emulate his whole-hearted benevolence and goodness."

CHAPTER XV.

"A NATIVE grace
Sat fair-proportioned on her polished limbs,
Vailed in a simple robe, their best attire,
Beyond the pomp of dress; for loveliness
Needs not the foreign aid of ornament,
But is, when unadorned, adorned the most.
Thoughtless of beauty, she was Beauty's self,
Recluse amid the close embowering woods."

SIX years rolled on. Within the halls of wealth and beauty their noiseless flight had scarce been known save for the costly gifts they treasured there. On Cicely Everson's queenly brow they had written with softly radiant pen the two-fold bliss of wife and mother; but no trace of care or sorrow had marked their swift course through her luxurious home. A star of the first magnitude was she in the bright galaxy of high-born beauties which graced her circle. Beautiful, gifted, beloved, blessed in all that makes life dear to woman, why should the youthful Lady Willoughby note the rolling years or feel the touch of Time's wings as it flew lightly past!

But in other homes, where with toil and struggle each upward step was gained, where slowly life un-

vailed its mysteries, these years have left their daily record as page by page it grew.

Up on a high rock — so high, her form revealed itself against the sky — sat one on whom six summer suns had wrought a wondrous change. Her raven hair, laid smoothly back, disclosed a lofty brow, wherein thought, deep, searching thought, might find a fit abode. She was not beautiful; yet in the native ease and grace with which she poised herself upon her aerial throne, the dark, flashing eye which seemed to gather into its depths all the glorious beauties of that mountain scene, one could read an inborn soul of loveliness and purity. Nell's six years had not been spent in vain. Her quick mind had far outstripped the simple limits of a village school, and on the morrow, with longing steps and hopes elate, she would seek a higher fount of knowledge. This it was which had led her to her old, familiar seat on the mountain-top to gaze once more into that world of which she had had but one strange glimpse, and whither she was now going to mingle in its scenes.

The deeper shade of thoughtfulness, not unmixed with eager anticipation, which rested on her face, betrayed how busily fancy was weaving its imaginary web within. Allured by its bright gossamer hues, Nell's thoughts forsook the world around her, and reveled in the elysian fields with which youth ever surrounds the future. The future! Ah! little heeds that dreaming maiden how quickly the chasm is bridged

over! how, even while she dreams, its shadowy form is flitting near.

"Hist! Everson! Step softly! man! Yonder, as I live, sits the queen of this wild realm!"

"Some goddess, rather, who has staid her chariot-wheels upon the pinnacle of her lone domain."

"Goddess or queen, she bears a noble air. Quick! with our pencils! we must not lose this rare view," and quietly seating himself, the last speaker opened his portfolio and rapidly sketched the scene, while his companion, none other than our old friend Walter Everson, stood gazing alternately at the fair vision which had so suddenly burst upon them, and the masterly transcript, fast growing into life under the artist's hand. Foreign travel had imparted a darker hue to young Everson's cheek, a *sturdier* look to his slight frame; but other than this he had not changed, except, perhaps, the haughty curve around his lips had grown a shade more deep.

In striking contrast was his companion's frank, open face, on which nature had proudly laid her symmetrizing hand as if to compete with the noble soul she encased within. Though his veins coursed with choicest blood, the young Englishman had not yet learned the *grades* of caste. His was a heart as yet untouched, unfettered by cold, conventional forms.

"Inspiration, Murray!" Walter Everson exclaimed as the former held out the transferred scene before him; "nothing else could have produced such a picture

as that! Our fair goddess has thrown her spell around you."

"I would I knew who and what she were!" said Murray looking earnestly up at Nell, who, unconscious of their gaze, still sat wrapped in her delicious reverie.

"Let us approach the royal presence," Everson gayly replied; "perchance she may graciously enlighten us on the subject. I confess I should like a nearer view of those glorious dark orbs which she has not yet deigned to cast upon us."

"Talk of *my* being bewitched, Everson; the sorcery of those dark orbs, as you so enthusiastically call them, has already deprived you of every sense but one; see where your steps would lead!" and the young man laughingly pointed to a thorny bush into which Walter Everson was about to plunge.

"Hush! hush! don't laugh so loud, Murray; see now she hears us and has taken fright. What matchless grace is in her step! how fairy-like she glides along!"

"Who can she be?" asked Murray, following with his eye Nell's quick and light descent.

"Some stray waif from the spirit-land, I should say," Everson replied, "but that the blush which mounted to her cheek at sight of us was far too earthly. Come, let's follow on; there is, if I mistake not, a fortune-teller's hut not far from here, where I once had the felicity of being shut up three or four weeks with the half-demon, half-human presiding genius of the place.

If she be there yet, and such creatures never die, we can, no doubt, readily learn some tidings of our fair unknown. What say you?"

"A fortune-teller! I should like it above all things; not that I have the slightest belief in things supernatural, but such a specimen as you have described must be a great curiosity; let us seek her hut by all means, and tell me of your adventure as we go along. Strange that you have never mentioned it before."

"Were it not for the lovely apparition on yonder rock, I would not, in truth, have cared to encounter again the basilisk eyes of the old crone. I shall never forget the powerful impression she made on my weak nerves by her arts. However, she has doubtless lost all remembrance of me e'er this, so I will e'en venture within her charmed walls again."

So saying, young Everson led the way to Esther Cram's door, regaling his companion meanwhile with all that his memory could recall of his captivity there.

"Strangely enough," he concluded his tale, "the old hag took quite a fancy to me from the first, and absolutely refused all remuneration for the trouble I had caused her; so I placed a small sum in the hands of the physician to expend in civilizing, if possible, her imp of a child. My good mother doubted the wisdom of this, but one must do something in such a case rather than be under any obligation to a creature like her. Besides, I'll warrant the little savage was never hurt by it."

"Nor benefited either, I should judge from your account of her," Murray added; "but what could induce any mother to rear her child in a place like this?"

"The same which induces any other wild inhabitant of this forest. 'Twas her nature, man."

"And whence, think you, came that nature, Walter Everson?" cried a shrill voice, which made them start; "instinct teaches the wild beast to flee from the face of man, but man himself must taste the bitter fruit of knowledge ere he learns to shun his kind."

"'Tis the very old beldam herself!" Walter had just time to whisper to his companion as Esther Cram emerged from behind the rock which had concealed her from their view and placed herself before them. Her changed looks and demeanor surprised young Everson far more than her sudden appearance there. Indeed, but for her voice and words, he could have scarcely recognized the old fiendish-looking fortune-teller in the plain but neatly-dressed woman who stood before him with such a calm and dignified bearing.

"I beg your pardon, madam," said he, involuntarily quailing in her presence. "I had not thought you were so near."

"And therefore the poisoned tongue could speed its arrows without check," she added sternly. "Go your way, young man. Every drop of Arthur Everson's blood has been filtered from your veins."

"Your reproof is severe, and I confess not unmerited," Walter frankly replied; "yet if the offense be

not unpardonable, I would bespeak for my friend here the benefit of your mystic lore, of which I was once, as you may remember, an astonished witness."

"Ay, I remember well," she replied with a sad tone; then fixing her keen eye on young Murray's face, she added: "One may run and read when a fair, open book like that is laid before them. It needs no second sight, no mystic lore, to tell of high and lofty thoughts, of noble deeds, to which such gentle blood inspires. One light alone is wanting there." She paused with softened look.

"And that?"

With clasped hands she raised her withered face to heaven:

"The light of God's holy presence."

Struck with surprise and awe, the young man stood silent, while Everson, less impressible, replied:

"You were not wont to speak thus. If I mistake not, the name you now utter so reverently has dwelt upon your lips with far different import."

"Let the darkness of the past lie hid in its own grave! Young men, you came hither to listen to an idle tale; yet I will read your destiny from the unerring book of Fate."

The fortune-teller raised one hand as in slow and reverent accents she repeated:

"For behold the day cometh that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly

shall be stubble; and the day that cometh shall burn them up saith the Lord of hosts."

"Excuse me," hastily interrupted Walter Everson, "if I remind you that such remarks are extremely ill-timed; I advise you to go back to your old trade if, indeed, you have left it. But we will trouble you no farther, except it be to ask if you can give us any information with regard to a certain lovely young lady we espied in our ramble over the mountain; a most bewitching maiden, as we both can testify."

Esther Cram looked up with a quick, startled glance. "Where did you see her?"

"Enthroned on a rocky eminence as though just alighted from the clouds. Angel she was not, for her hair was like the raven's wing, her eyes the same midnight hue, and a rosy blush mantled her rich brown cheek as she fled with light, fleet steps from our approach."

"And if she fled, why seek to trace her steps?"

"The 'why' is very easily told," young Murray smilingly answered; "the truth is, the maiden in her flight has borne away my friend's heart, and he would fain follow."

Despite her efforts to appear calm, the woman's voice trembled with agitation as she replied:

"Then seek no further, lest the father's fate follow the son. Walter Everson, beware! she's no fit mate for thee!"

"Then you know her?" eagerly interrogated Walter. "Tell me who and what she is, or, rather, tell me where to seek her at once."

"She is both above and below your reach. Let that suffice. Nay, put back your purse. Esther Cram bargains not in hearts, else your whole wealth were scarce sufficient to gain your present wish."

"You set great value upon your communications," Everson replied with a sneer; "however, I can doubtless learn all I wish from the worthy Doctor who did me such service once, and who, if I rightly remember, was slightly inclined to be communicative. So, with equal thanks for your ill-timed preaching and kind reserve, we'll bid you adieu. Come, Murray," and he walked rapidly away.

But his companion lingered a moment:

"Do not think unkindly of my friend," said he as he saw the intense pain Everson's words caused the fortune-teller; "he is sometimes hasty and impulsive; but at heart a nobler fellow never lived. As for me, I shall not soon forget your words, good woman. Farewell!" and Murray hastened after his friend.

Esther Cram watched their descending forms with strangely mingled emotions; that of relief from impending danger seemed, however, uppermost, for she turned, with a long-drawn breath, towards her hut, exclaiming:

"Thank heaven, that cloud has passed, and to-morrow she'll be beyond their reach; but I must warn the

Doctor," and quickening her steps, she found Nell waiting her return with a beating heart.

The little adventure was soon told, many words of caution instilled upon the young girl's mind, and then mother and child descended with wary steps to the house of their benefactor, from whence Nell was to depart early the next morning.

CHAPTER XVI.

"What a spell she has,
To sway the inmost courses of the soul!
My spirit is held up to such a hight
I dare not breathe."

Scarce a ripple of the world's great tide of progress had reached the little secluded village among the mountains. Of wars and rumors of wars, of onward strides in civilization and refinement, of mighty political throes, they both heard and read; but the faint echoes died away without refrain.

Change had come, as come it must, to many a household hearth; some had gone from their quiet homes to the deeper quiet of the grave; while here and there a new cottage had reared its modest front, and opened wide its doors to blissful, newly-wedded love.

But in all their peculiar local characteristics, they still remained unchanged; the same simple tastes and habits, the same pure faith and worship, marked the dwellers in that temple of nature's own creation.

To Nell and her mother alone, who had lived among

them, as though not of them, these fleeting years had opened a new world of thought and feeling. The former saw life bright and beautiful before her—its path strewed with flowers, its future arched with the golden bow of promise; while to Esther Cram, as she looked far back through the dark vista of departed years, a power not of earth, a hand of no mortal mould, seemed to have led her on, through darkness, unbelief, and sin, to the glorious light which now filled her being.

No shadow came to the hearth of those who had first pointed the way of life to these dark, benighted souls; nothing but peace had dwelt under the kind-hearted Doctor's roof since their self-denying task had been so nobly met, so faithfully performed. Verily, they had their reward!

Esther Cram had never been able to conquer fully the superstitious fears, with regard to her child, which Walter Everson's first appearance at her hut excited. That her mind should have become morbidly sensitive to the peculiar trials she had suffered, was not strange; neither was it strange that her excited and prolific imagination connected the coming of Arthur's child with the fate of her own. So strongly had she allowed her mind to dwell upon this—so firmly fixed had the terrible idea become that her child was destined to suffer as she had done—that scarce could Gospel light blot out the dark thought. When, therefore, she again encountered Walter Everson upon the mountain, and saw how deeply he had been moved by Nell's loveliness, though

little dreaming who it was, no wonder the cold fear crept back again and aroused the mother's heart. The contemptuous manner in which he had spoken to his friend of her and her child, all of which she had heard, convinced her that, without his father's nobleness of heart, he inherited all the Everson pride. To no spirit's cave did she, as of old, repair; but with quick and cautious steps, as we have seen, she sought refuge and aid in the kind heart and strong good sense of Dr. Jepson and the womanly sympathies of his wife.

. . . . . .

"Not but what she's good enough for him," said the Doctor, at the conclusion of their long conference that evening; "Nell's fit to be the wife of a prince, or will be, when wife's sister Lyddy has finished her off at that grand boarding-school; but, as you say, Mrs. Cram, 'tain't best he should know any thing about her; an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure; an't that right, wife?"

"If Mrs. Cram has read the young man's character aright, no doubt it is the wisest course," Mrs. Jepson replied; "but I confess I had woven a little bit of romance, in which Walter Everson nobly redeems his father's house from the curse of pride, which seems to have settled upon it."

"A real love-story! just what you women delight in," said the Doctor, laughing; "only you can't make your hero say and do just what you please, as the books do; we'll study him though, and if he's made of the

right sort of stuff, why, who knows what may happen yet?"

"God preserve my child from such a fate!" Esther Cram exclaimed fervently—so fervently it had almost brought a smile to Mrs. Jepson's face.

"What would that haughty mother, that proud sister say," she mentally exclaimed, "could they hear the despised fortune-teller's prayer? preserved from marrying an Everson! when the highest in the land are deemed scarce worthy the alliance!"—but she did not speak the thought that so naturally intruded itself, lest the wound should rankle deeper; she only replied in a soft tone:

"Your child's fate, Mrs. Cram, is in the hands of One who doeth all things well; let us leave her there in faith and trust."

With the morning's dawn Nell arose bright and joyous, and went forth to launch her little boat upon the sea of life. God bless thee, youthful mariner! make but his word thy chart—thy compass, truth—the star of hope thy guide; so shalt thou ride securely o'er the treacherous billows of time, and safely moor thy bark at last on bright, perennial shores!

A few hours later, Walter Everson and his friend were chatting with the freedom of old acquaintances in the Doctor's cheerful sitting-room. The young Englishman's heart was fairly won by the genuine flow of good humor with which their host's conversation abounded.

"If I am not too bold, my good sir," said he, "allow

me to ask your specific for what we call the blues, as I am confident you possess one."

"A sound mind and vigorous body," the Doctor replied, slapping his broad chest; "what more can you have, except a clear conscience, of which I can't boast much."

"Very good, sir—but I have found no such physical vigor till I came to the mountains. Americans generally, and particularly the fairer portion of them, think it incompatible with gentility."

"Incompatible! and why? Because, to insure it, they must do something besides lounge away the morning in idleness and the evening in dissipation. Incompatible with laziness would be nearer the truth!"

"Your views would hardly be received with favor in fashionable society," Mr. Murray remarked with a smile; "nevertheless, I must confess to the truth of them. I have not yet seen a so-called genteel lady looking robust and healthy."

"You forget our fair maiden of the mountain," quickly interposed Walter Everson; "hers was a gentility and grace which could not be questioned in any circle; yet the ruddy glow upon her brown cheek, the free, elastic movements of her symmetrical form, gave unmistakable evidence of health and vigor one might be pardoned for envying. But that reminds me," he added, turning to the Doctor, "that I wished to ask you some questions concerning this self-same maiden: and first, can you tell me *who* she is?"

"Your question is rather ambiguous, Everson," said Murray, smiling; "Dr. Jepson could scarcely be expected to know who you mean by '*she*'—remember, he was not with us yesterday."

"Ah! I forgot," Everson replied, somewhat confused; "it is of a very lovely young lady, whom we saw seated upon a rock on the mountain, that I would gather some information. Do you know, sir, whether there is such an one staying in your village at present?"

"Ha! ha! ha! my young friend!" the Doctor laughingly replied; "why, our mountain girls are all Hebes, with rosy cheeks and brown skins; how can I tell which you have seen?"

"Excuse me, sir; I do not question the attractions of your mountain girls, as you call them; but this was a being of far different mold—with a lofty brow, an eye of hidden fire, and an air of refinement and ease about her, acquired only by contact with the world. We concluded she must be visiting these regions, like ourselves, for recreation and amusement."

"I do not know of any visitors here now," said the Doctor; "they are few and far between. You are quite sure, are you, that it could not be one of our own pretty girls, ladyfied by the aid of your imagination?" he added, with a sly twinkle of his eye.

"Impossible! quite impossible!" Everson exclaimed, in a slightly vexed tone; "I flatter myself I have known too much of the world to be so deceived."

"I meant no offense," said the Doctor good-humoredly; "young folks are apt to look through rose-colored glasses, you know."

"I take no offense at your words, sir," Everson replied; "but I must confess I was annoyed at the remarks of the good people where we are staying; when I asked them last evening, on our return from our ramble, concerning this same young lady, one of them very demurely replied to my description of her, that she thought it must be that horrid witch's daughter, they call Wild Nell—as if I didn't know the difference between an untamed savage and a high-born maiden."

The long, loud laugh his words caused somewhat disconcerted Everson, and brought the Doctor's wife from another room, to learn the cause of his merriment.

"Do come in, Betsy!" he cried; "Gim-i-*ni!* 'tis the best joke I've heard this many a day."

"I don't wonder it amuses you," said Walter, as Mrs. Jepson seemed quite inclined to join in her husband's mirth; "my friend Murray here laughed outright at the absurdity of the thing. Just conceive of that misshaped, scraggly-haired, glaring-eyed creature being mistaken by us for a goddess or queen! 'tis too ridiculous, I declare;" and he too joined in their laugh, despite his vexation.

"I hope you do not consider your bounty to that poor child so wholly lost as your words imply," Mrs. Jepson remarked to Walter; "'twould be a poor return for your kindness, if we had allowed her to grow

up so misshaped, scraggly, and ugly as you have described her."

"I have no fear but what my bounty, as you are pleased to call it, has been properly expended in her behalf. If you have succeeded in *civilizing* her, it is the extent of my expectations; indeed, my object in bestowing the money was more to rid myself of an irksome obligation to her mother than from any hope of benefiting her materially; so don't place to my credit any thing but selfishness, in that matter; but where is the child now? I should rather like to see how she looks."

"Six years have made her something more than a child," Mrs. Jepson replied; "we think she has improved very much—indeed, we have all reason to be grateful for your kindness. See," she added, opening a closet-door, "how a part of your gift to us has been expended."

"It was no gift, my dear madam—no more than a just requital of your husband's great service to me; but you have really a well-selected library here."

"It has been a source of great enjoyment to me, I assure you, and has kept your name in perpetual remembrance with us."

"A worthy memento of any man!" Murray exclaimed, looking over the choice volumes: "I would I could leave some token deserving like remembrance."

"Paint them a picture, Murray," said Walter eagerly; "they would prize that, I'm sure."

"Most gladly, if it would be acceptable," said Murray, bowing to Mrs. Jepson; "but what scene shall I choose?"

"Any thing you please," she replied; "if indeed you will be so kind. I love paintings next to books, and should esteem such a gift very highly."

Murray opened his portfolio, which he always carried with him in such excursions: "What shall it be, Everson?" said he.

"Take that," said Walter, drawing forth the sketch he had made the day before· "it may help us in our search for her."

But Murray quickly replaced it. "Excuse me; not that, if you please," said he, coloring; "that is designed for another purpose. Here is one which I think will please Mrs. Jepson better;" and he produced a most exquisite view of their own little village, shadowed by its noble mountains. While the Doctor and his wife were intently admiring the beautiful picture, Walter Everson said in a low tone to his friend:

"Why are you so choice of that little sketch, Murray? don't you see how it might be of service in tracing our fair incog?"

"I have reasons which I can not give you," Murray replied, again coloring beneath his friend's scrutinizing eye.

"In love, as I live!" exclaimed Walter, with more feeling than he cared to show. "Are we to be rivals, Gus?"

"Rivals, forsooth!" said Murray, recovering himself, with a smile. "Yes, we will be rivals; but it shall be in art, not in chasing a shadow, though it be a fair one."

"*She* was no shadow," Walter warmly replied; "and it shall be no fault of mine if I see her not again."

"It will give me great pleasure to copy this for you, madam," said Murray, receiving his sketch with warm encomiums from Mrs. Jepson.

"And we shall gratefully esteem your kindness in so doing, I assure you, sir," she replied, as they rose to leave.

"Where now?" asked the Doctor; "going to search for your beauty, eh?"

"We have planned a more thorough exploration of the mountain to-day, sir," Everson replied, "and I have also my peace to make with the old witch up yonder. She thinks I'm a graceless fellow, no doubt, because I advised her to stick to her old calling and not try to turn saint; but I must contrive some way to get into her good graces again. By the way, you did not tell me where her child is; perhaps I can touch the mother's heart through her. Is she up there with her?"

"No; Nell is at school now, and I doubt very much whether you will find Esther Cram at the 'Crag;' she goes up there occasionally, for she has a strong attachment to her old home, but she lives close by, in that little cottage. Could you know her sad history, Mr. Everson, you would scarcely wonder that she was what

you saw her six years ago; but she is changed, very much changed, since then."

"I was greatly impressed with her words and manner yesterday," Mr. Murray remarked; "indeed, I can not banish them from my mind yet. I should be much gratified if you would favor us with her story."

"That I can not do without betraying confidence," the Doctor replied; "but I will give you the moral of it in a few words, and it is this: pride, especially the pride of birth, is a sin against God, which will assuredly bring with it its own punishment."

The young men walked away in silence, each busy with his own thoughts. The path they followed at random led up to a favorite resort of the villagers—a sort of rude arbor, formed of wild forest-trees, intertwined with mountain ivy, its one open side commanding a most picturesque view of the little scattered homesteads they so dearly loved.

"What conceit!" at length Walter Everson impatiently exclaimed, giving vent to his thoughts, as they stopped to rest on the rough seats of this arbor; "how can *such* a man be supposed to know any thing of the demands of society! Doubtless, with his plebeian notions, he would consider you or I *fitly* allied with any of these mountain Hebes, as he calls them. Bah! what ignorance."

"Ha! ha! ha! Everson, you're rather sorely touched, I see. But isn't the good Doctor more than half-right, after all? Suppose, for instance, (begging her pardon!)

the beautiful maiden we saw yesterday should prove to be of humble birth, what would you say then?"

"That were she ten times more beautiful, and I ten times more captivated than now, I could not marry her. I will never marry one I do not love—neither will I sacrifice family honor to my affections."

"Worthy son of a worthy mother!" exclaimed a shrill voice near them; "your pillow shall be thorns, and your bed thistles, for so you are preparing it!"

"Let us go hence!" exclaimed Walter, moving quickly away; "that miserable old fortune-teller seems to have become my evil genius."

Esther Cram, just returning from her hut, whither she had been to spend her first few childless hours alone, confronted the young men, with an expression in which sadness and exultation were strangely mingled.

"The kind shepherd has removed his lamb from the prowling wolf," said she. "Go, search till eyes and heart be weary—the bird has flown from the fowler's snare. Walter Everson, your evil genius lies hid in your own breast—it will follow you—it will torture you, and at last it will claim you, body and soul, if you drive it not thence; for your father's sake, give heed to my words. Farewell!"

Ere they had time to speak, she turned, and was hidden from their view.

CHAPTER XVII.

"WHOM first we love, you know, we seldom wed.
Time rules us all. And life, indeed, is not
The thing we planned it out ere hope was dead.
And then, we women can not choose our lot."

"WHAT a beautiful world this is, Aunt Waters; and how kind and good every body seems! Oh! it is a joy to live, isn't it!" The enthusiastic girl raised her dark eyes to the face of the lady, at whose feet she reclined, with one arm thrown carelessly over her lap.

"It is indeed," Mrs. Waters replied with a smile, smoothing fondly the glossy black hair of the youthful speaker; "it is indeed a joy to live, if we rightly serve the purposes of our being. But one would think, to hear you speak, dear Nellie, that your life had been all sunshine. Have you forgotten the dark days, when you ran about the mountain, a poor, ignorant, neglected child?"

"Forget them? never!" the young girl almost passionately exclaimed; "how can I ever forget the dear old mountain? but they were not all dark days, dear

aunt; there were some beautiful, oh! so bright and beautiful, I can not describe them."

"Tell me of those days, Nellie dear; you know I am a sort of second mother to you, now; then give me a daughter's confidence, and talk freely of those early days, with all the strange thoughts and fancies you must have had."

"They were all so good to my poor mother and me," murmured Nellie; "dear, kind Dr. Jepson, and aunt Betsy, my patient, loving teacher, good old John and Molly, and ever so many more; and now, you have taken me, the poor beggar girl, to your beautiful home, that I may be educated and accomplished, as in my wild dreams, I once prayed to be. Oh! who will ever repay you all for such kindness?"

"I expect to be repaid for what little I can do, by seeing my dear Nellie become a true and noble woman; my sister, who has done far more for you, than it will ever be in my power to do, asks no greater reward, I am sure."

"I never can be half as good as Aunt Betsy and you are," said Nellie, speaking slowly, and shaking her head.

"Then you will greatly disappoint us," Mrs. Waters replied with a smile; "for we expect much from you now."

"But I can not be like her," Nellie exclaimed earnestly; "why, has she not made my poor, wretched mother, a happy woman, and bestowed upon me that

most precious of all gifts—the knowledge I so coveted; and now, are not you——"

Mrs. Waters playfully placed her hand over Nellie's mouth; "don't anticipate," said she, "I have done nothing for you yet; indeed, I am your debtor."

"My debtor, aunt! what *do* you mean?"

"Yes, my dear girl, I feel that I am indebted to you for a most invaluable lesson—one which I trust I shall never forget."

"You grow stranger and stranger, aunt," said Nellie, with a puzzled look; "how could such an ignorant girl give you a lesson?"

"'Twas a lesson of faith, Nellie; unwittingly taught by you, though none the less impressive and I hope profitable to me."

"Tell me what you mean, Aunt Waters; I do not understand you yet."

"I will tell you, dear; but first, I must show you a picture I have;" Mrs. Waters rose as she spoke, and unlocking her writing-desk, took from thence a small case: "there," said she, giving it to Nellie, "do you know who that is?"

"O aunt!" was all Nellie could utter, as she gazed with burning cheeks upon the picture.

"You need not shrink so from the remembrance of what you once were," said Mrs. Waters kindly; "it but strengthens the contrast in your favor now. But I did not show you this to wound your feelings, or humiliate them; it should do neither; rather, look upon

it, as I have done, in grateful recognition of that Power which controls our destinies. Where, but for that power, would you now be, dear Nellie?"

"I can not bear to think," Nellie murmured with a tearful eye.

"Neither would I have you," Mrs. Waters replied, "except so far as your gratitude needs guidance. Now I will tell you what I have learned from and through you. It was on a visit to my sister, just after she had placed you at school, that I first saw you. You were then like that picture; a strange-looking child, wild, untamed, and it seemed to me untamable. So I tried to persuade my sister, but she was not to be dissuaded from any course which her heart had once recognized as duty. To all my arguments and evil prophecies she only returned the simple answer, that whatever the child might become, she must conscientiously perform a duty so plainly set before her. Neither was she without faith in the result, though you, dear Nellie, have far exceeded her most sanguine hopes.

"Four years later, I could scarcely believe the evidence of my own eyes, when I again saw you, rapidly gaining the head of your school, and beloved even as a dear child, by my sister and her husband. Then I exclaimed: 'I will doubt no more the reward of a faithful performance of duty!' I took you to my heart, as I have now taken you to my home, dear girl, and I thank God for having taught me, through you, such a lesson of his limitless power and goodness."

Mrs. Waters paused, while Nellie, with still suffused eyes, leaned her head upon her hand in deep thought.

"How strange it all seems," at length she said; "only six years ago, I was as wild and thoughtless as my little pet Lolo; and as ignorant too, for I did not even know there was such a world as this, till—till ——" she hesitated, and finally stopped; a vivid blush betraying some hoarded secret, which had well-nigh escaped her lips.

With quick instinct, Mrs. Waters divined her thoughts, for she was no stranger to Esther Cram's fears with regard to Walter Everson. She knew, too, that with no rude touch should the chords in that finely-strung spirit be swept. So she quietly and softly re joined:

"You have no cause to blush for that ignorance, dear Nellie; there was none to teach you better, then. I dare say, if Mr. Everson ——"

"Mr. Everson!" interrupted Nellie, with a quick and eager look; "how did you know about him, aunt?"

"My sister told me of his accident and sickness at your mother's hut, and I also heard from his own lips the story of his adventure among the mountains."

"Then you have seen him! have heard him talk! O aunt! isn't he noble and good?"

"Your imagination has doubtless invested him with every perfection," said Mrs. Waters, smiling at Nellie's fervor; "take care that he does not find it out, when you see him again."

"Shall I ever see him again?" Nellie asked with ingenuous earnestness.

"You will be very likely to, for he is one of my neighbors; do you think you should know him?"

"Know him! oh! yes, aunt; but he would never remember me;" and the long lashes drooped over Nellie's saddened eyes.

"Would you wish him to, Nellie? think what you were when he knew you; would you have him remember you as the little ragged, wild-looking child, that frightened his horse upon the mountain, and nearly cost him his life?"

Mrs. Waters trembled as she thus sounded the very depths of the young girl's heart, but she felt that in this way alone, could healthful impulses be imparted. Nor was she mistaken; Nellie saw at a glance the fallacy of her long and secretly cherished feelings towards him who had first awakened her mind: she comprehended, instinctively, her own changed position; yet, through all this, arose a simple feeling which caused her eye to flash, and her cheek to burn again, as she replied:

"Yes, aunt, I would have him remember me just as I was; why should I not?"

"But what if it would subject you to his ridicule; how could you bear that?"

"His *ridicule!* O aunt! you do not know him! 'twas he who first inspired me with a longing for knowledge; 'twas his kindness that put it into the hearts of the dear

Doctor and Aunt Betsy to befriend me; he could not despise what he so largely helped to make!"

Mrs. Waters mentally acknowledged the truth of Nellie's plea, as she gazed into the animated face of the lovely girl.

"No, he could not despise you, Nellie dear," said she; "perhaps it would be better for you if he should."

"Better to be despised by him!" Nellie cried, with a puzzled and half-offended look: "you surely do not mean so, aunt?"

"Never mind what I mean; you may understand it better by and by," Mrs. Waters replied kindly; "but remember, you are to be known, for the present, to Mr. Everson and all the world besides, as my niece; it will save you much annoyance, and, indeed, as the adopted child of my sister, you are so."

Nellie was too unsophisticated to estimate the value of such a position—she only viewed it as another mark of that affection, to which her heart was ever ready to respond.

Her simple "I thank you, dear aunt," though warmly uttered, would have provoked many a smile among the worldly wise, could they have witnessed the scene; for they would have foretold honor, wealth, and a brilliant future to the beautiful girl, so quietly and unconsciously accepting the rare gift. But Mrs. Waters loved the guileless simplicity with which Nellie received her favors—she would have the dear girl, if so it might be,

ever retain her happy ignorance of the social distinctions of wealth and position.

"A penny for your thoughts," at length she exclaimed, playfully tapping Nellie's shoulder, after a few moments' silence; "are you looking back with longing eyes, to the dear old home you have left, or forward with dread to your entrance into Miss Hargrave's famous temple of learning?"

"Neither, and yet both," Nellie answered with a smile; "I love to think of my home and friends, and I do dread going to that great school; but I long so to learn, that I mean to overcome all those feelings."

"That is right; keep up a brave heart; you will find many pleasant associates there, and Miss Hargrave will be like a mother to you. I have already bespoke her favor for my dear niece, Miss Morrison."

"Friends every where! what a happy girl I ought to be!" Nellie exclaimed, skipping gayly to the window.

A smothered shriek almost instantly burst from her lips. "O aunt!" she cried, "'tis he! 'tis he! he sees me; he is coming up the steps; oh! let me fly, for I can not meet him now; I should betray myself;" and with a wildly throbbing heart she flew to her own room.

"Poor girl! I ought to have prepared her for this," said Mrs. Waters; "but I hoped he would not call till she had gone."

Walter Everson glanced eagerly toward the window as he was announced, and a shade of disappointment

crossed his fine face. Always at ease in Mrs. Waters' elegant drawing-room, he could not, nevertheless, regain his composure for many moments. At length, in a tone intended to appear careless, but which was far otherwise to the quick ear of his hostess, he said:

"By the way, my dear madam, what dark-eyed houri was that which greeted my eyes as I ascended your steps? She seems to have vanished as suddenly as she appeared."

"It was my niece, I presume," Mrs. Waters replied in the same tone; "she is with me just now."

"Your niece! is it possible!" Everson exclaimed; "may I ask you, if she has been journeying lately? if she has not recently visited the White Mountains?"

It was Mrs. Waters' turn to be astonished: was it possible he had so quickly recognized Nellie as the little mountain girl!

"She has just returned from there; but how could you know any thing about it?" she replied, trembling for his answer.

"I knew I could not be mistaken," he added, with increasing warmth. "But your niece! why is it I have never heard of her before?"

"Really, Mr. Everson," said Mrs. Waters, laughing, "one would think your head had been quite turned, or your heart lost, by this little timid school-girl."

"Pardon me, madam," he replied, coloring deeply, "if I seem inquisitive; it is but a few weeks since I saw that same face under circumstances that left a strong

impression upon my mind; to find her under your roof, and a relative, is a surprise as great as it is agreeable."

"Miss Morrison has reason to feel very much flattered by your words, and will doubtless, at some future time, give you an opportunity to repeat them," Mrs. Waters replied with a smile, politely anticipating a request she feared; "but at present her mind must not be diverted from her studies."

"Now has my glorious queen a name and habitation!" exclaimed Walter Everson, as he trod the street once more with a buoyant step; "one, too, for which she need not blush. Now, at last, shall my heart find its noble ideal—my hand shall seek its peer. *She must be mine!*"

CHAPTER XVIII.

"Believe not that your inner eye
Can ever in just measure try
The worth of hours as they go by.

"For every man's weak self, alas!
Makes him to see them while they pass,
As through a dim or tinted glass.

"But if in earnest care you would
Mete out to each its part of good,
Trust rather to your after-mood."

It was a bright, autumnal day, warmed by the lingering breath of a just sped summer, some three years after the events in our last chapter, that a bevy of maidens, sparkling with the life and exuberance of youthful spirits, gathered around the foot of an old maple tree beneath the shade of its falling leaves.

It was a picturesque scene worthy an artist's pen. From the laughing blonde to the brunette's dark, flashing eye, every type of beauty seemed to have its representative there, while ever and anon, as the breeze swept through its branches, the old maple showered their fair heads with its gorgeously tinted leaves. Some merrily wove their brilliant hues into fantastic

wreaths and placed them on their companions' brows, while others, filled with more earnest thoughts, conversed together in low, eager tones.

"To-morrow we part," said one in a voice of thrilling sweetness; "and who knows, girls, how and when we shall meet again!"

The fair speaker's waist was at once encircled by loving arms.

"Oh! we shall meet often, I trust, dear Nellie," was the cheerful reply; "you know we've promised to assist at each other's bridal, and I'll venture you'll be be the first to call for our services."

"I shall never marry," said the first speaker with decision.

"*You* never marry! Ha! ha! ha! It will require even more than *your* strength of mind to resist such a host of importunate lovers as will hover about you."

"Well done, Hattie; you seem to have the gift of foresight," said another; "can not you predict something nice for the rest of us?"

"Oh! Nellie is different from any of us, you know, girls; there is something so grand, so wild, so fascinating about her, that it fairly bewitches every body; and then her position in society will be so brilliant, too. No, I can not promise any of you such a future as hers."

"Let us be the first, then, to render allegiance to this queen of hearts," cried a light-hearted girl approaching Nellie and kneeling in mock obeisance before

her, while two others laid a magnificent crown of leaves upon her brow. Instantly every knee was bent in playful earnestness, while the air resounded with their merry shouts of "Long live our queen."

The lovely girl received this rapturous homage for a moment in silence; the color rapidly flitting upon her dark, expressive face, and her lustrous eye beaming with an emotion which showed how deeply her heart was stirred.

"Were I indeed your queen, dear girls," at length she said, "'tis not allegiance I'd crave, but *love*."

"Love!" repeated one of the group; "who so loved in all our school as Nellie Morrison?"

"Or respected, or admired, or honored?" chimed in several voices at once.

"Girls, dear girls, I shall never forget your kindness and affection," said Nellie with deep feeling, "never, though we should not meet again, as something within tells me we shall not. But come, 'tis time to return to the house to prepare for the morrow."

"When we shall all have an opportunity to test our claim to honor, respect, and admiration," said another. "Oh! don't you dread the examination, girls?"

"I think Nellie has the most severe ordeal to pass through; just to think of reading one's own composition in the presence of so many learned people as will be here; those aristocratic Eversons from Philadelphia, for instance. They say Walter Everson is very highly educated; but he's disagreeable enough for all that,

I'm sure, with his high notions. Going abroad hasn't improved him one whit. At least, I think so."

"Do your best, Queen Nell, to captivate his highness," playfully rejoined another; "nothing but royalty, it seems, will meet his views."

"I am dizzy — faint. Let me go to yonder brook; please do not follow me," stammered Nellie, abruptly leaving the astonished group and hastening to the shade of a neighboring grove, through which a tiny stream gurgled its way along.

"Why can I never hear that name without this wild throbbing at my heart?" she murmured, elasping her hands tightly across her breast; "what power is it that so stirs my soul to its very depths at every thought of him! He knows me not; he can never know the spirit he awaked to life, nor can he gaze into its inmost recesses, where lies his image embalmed forever. What do I not owe him! education, friends, happiness, nay, almost life itself, and yet I may not tell him this — may not fall down before him, as I fain would, and bless him next alone to God! To-morrow I shall be in his presence, shall breathe the same air, shall look upon that face whose every lineament is so indelibly stamped here. The very thought fills me with inspiration! to him alone, of all that listen to my words, shall my spirit address itself. What, if some answering chord should waft its joy back to my heart! What, if spirit meet spirit in happy recognition!"

With a radiant smile, Nellie sought with fleet steps

the solitude of her own room, where for hours she reveled in the bright and beautiful creations of her own fancy.

The morrow came with its freight of sunshine, smiles, and tears. To none of the pupils in Miss Hargrave's establishment did it bring such mingled emotions of joy and sadness as to her who had been taken from the mountain wilds and placed under the gentle teachings of one so eminently fitted to mold her character.

Nellie had found in Miss Hargrave just such a friend as she needed; judicious, kind, ever ready to sympathize in the varying moods of her pupil's peculiar temperament, guarding and guiding with tender faithfulness the brilliant though somewhat erratic mind given to her charge, and, above all, securing the ardent, confiding love of the warm-hearted girl. It was not till after that affection had been most cordially reciprocated that Mrs. Waters ventured to communicate Nellie's story to her teacher, and when, through her tears, Miss Hargrave exclaimed, "Dear, noble girl, she shall ever find a friend in me," Mrs. Waters felt that she had rendered a truly valuable service to her *protégé*.

Miss Hargrave fulfilled her promise in no measured degree, and was richly repaid for her care by the wonderful growth and development of Nellie's mind and character.

Her labor of love, however, was at an end, for the day which dawned so brightly and with such eager

anticipations upon the youthful members of her household was the last Nellie would spend under her roof as her pupil. An almost maternal fondness had grown into her heart for the dear girl, causing her ere yet that morning's sun shone upon the closed eyelids of the sleeper, to bend with tears and blessings over her unconscious form.

The night had been one of tumult and unrest to Nellie. Strange dreams had haunted her pillow and wet her cheek with tears; how sweetly soothing then, as she slowly and wearily unclosed her eyes, was the morning vision which met her gaze; the mild, loving face of her teacher, full of a sad, tender earnestness, while in whispered words *her name* was blended with the fervent breathings of that faithful heart.

"Dear, dear Miss Hargrave," she murmured, throwing her arms fondly around her, "how can I leave you to-day?"

"The separation can not be more painful to you than to me," said Miss Hargrave, caressing her; "you have become very dear to me, Nellie; how dear I scarcely realized till this, the day of parting, came; and O my dear girl! should trouble come, as I fear it must, to your young heart, remember ever that you have a friend in me."

"A sure talisman against all trouble," said Nellie, smiling through her tears; and then she added more earnestly: "What have I to fear, surrounded as I am by so many loving hearts?"

"Those loving hearts can not shield yours from every piercing arrow the world aims there; can not ward off every blow from your defenseless head. You may have to suffer much, Nellie, from which we would willingly, gladly save you, but can not. Let the remembrance of my words this morning, then, cheer and comfort you. God bless you ever, my dear, dear child."

One long tearful embrace, with hearts too full for utterance, and then Miss Hargrave softly and quietly withdrew.

The large hall in which the closing exercises of the school were to take place had been transformed by busy hands into a bower of evergreens mingled with bright autumn flowers and brilliant frost-tinted leaves. Across one end a platform had been elevated, overhung with green branches and gracefully festooned with leaves and flowers.

'Twas a fairy like scene when the white flowing robes and wreath-crowned brows of lovely maidens flitted through the leaves. Most fitting, too, was such a stage for their simple *débût.*

At a little distance apart from the crowd of eager spectators, two young men sat conversing together in low tones, casting now and then a glance of anxious expectation towards a small door which opened upon the rustic stage.

"Report says she is as talented as beautiful," whispered one. "Guard well your heart, Everson."

"Allow me to repeat the timely caution in your ear, Murray," replied the other with a careless laugh. "I am heart-proof, you know."

"To all save mountain goddesses," added his companion mischievously.

"A truce to all jesting upon that subject," said Everson with more agitation than he cared to betray; "you know I have never seen her since, at least, I have never spoken with her."

"Simply because you could not. It is wise in Mrs. Waters to keep her secluded till her education is completed. What a sensation her 'coming out' will create!"

"Hush! Murray! There she comes! Pshaw! 'tis only—oh! heavens! 'tis she!"

Walter Everson's muttered ejaculations ceased as Nellie emerged from the door he had been watching, and advanced with quiet, timid grace to the front of the platform. A low murmur of admiration ran around the hall, which caused the rich blood to mantle her cheek, as in tremulous tones she commenced the part assigned her.

Walter Everson gazed bewilderingly upon the beautiful being before him. He heard not her voice, though it fell in soft, rich cadence upon his ear. He comprehended not the words she uttered, though they glowed with high and noble thoughts. Somewhere in the dim past floated the memory of that face and form; somewhere had that vision of radiant loveliness crossed his

path before. Suddenly his eye brightened, and a rapturous smile stole over his face as a long-forgotten scene in the past slowly unfolded itself before him — a wild, unearthly scene within the fortune-teller's hut upon the mountain, where, through sulphureous gleams, a tall, gaunt form revealed to him his "future." Clearly and distinctly came the remembrance of that strange hour —the darkened room, the demon specters, the crone's black, piercing eyes reading his very soul, the crystal vision—all were before him once more, but with a new and deeper significance. For, in that living, breathing form of beauty upon which his gaze was riveted, he recognized the original of those sybilline revelations!

"What spell has come over you, Everson?" whispered his companion, "that you join not in the homage to our 'glorious queen?' 'Twas a masterly production. For once, report has not belied the truth. Her mind is indeed as richly endowed as her form. Who can say more?"

Recalled by these words, Everson replied confusedly:

"Really, I have not heard one word she said. Indeed, I scarcely knew she spoke at all. Come, let's go. My thoughts oppress me; I would breathe a freer air!" and placing his arm within his friend's, they joined the dispersing crowd and left the hall in silence.

He did not catch the quick, eager glance which followed his retreat, or see the flushed cheek grow pale at his seeming indifference. He could not know the wild,

tumultuous thoughts that filled that young girl's breast, nor hear her spirit's cry for light and strength.

Ah! Nell! rapidly are the pages in life's great book opening to thy sight, but while thou holdest the talismanic key which unlocks its mysteries, thou need'st not fear nor be dismayed. Tremblingly we follow thy steps lest the world rob thee of this thy birthright — lest, in its vague mists, thy simple light shall cease to burn and TRUTH no longer guide thy way!

CHAPTER XIX.

"Through suffering and sorrow thou hast past,
To show us what a woman true may be;
They have not taken sympathy from thee,
Nor made thee any other than thou wast;
Save as some tree, which, in a sudden blast,
Sheddeth those blossoms that were weakly grown
Upon the air, but keepeth every one
Whose strength gives warrant of good fruit at last."

"Do you remember what I told you years ago, Cicely —that I would yet show you my ideal of woman?"

"Yes, I remember very well, Walter; and you have found her now, you think—were you not about to say so?"

The cool, matter-of-fact manner with which her youthful ladyship anticipated his avowal, somewhat disconcerted Walter Everson, yet he replied:

"I have indeed seen her, Cicely; but the reality far exceeds my ideal."

"Just what all lovers say," his sister rejoined with a smile; "but really, Walter, I do not wonder much at your infatuation; Miss Morrison is bewitchingly beautiful."

"'Tis not alone her beauty that attracts me, radiant

as it is," said Walter, enthusiastically; "there is a simple purity, a sacredness, so to speak, about her, that calls up all my better feelings when in her presence. And then, she has the stamp of true nobility upon her brow, which neither you nor I disdain, you know."

"True, Walter, and without which, I verily believe, no one could command our love or respect. So far, Miss Morrison is unexceptionable, certainly. But when, think you, shall I have the honor of calling her my sister?"

"O Cicely! I dare not hope ever to call her mine! never yet have I breathed a word of love in her pure ear! I fear to break the spell her presence brings—I fear she'd spurn the heart I'd gladly lay at her feet."

"Walter, you are crazed with this new passion, or you would not talk thus! you forget that you bear the name of Everson—a name, thank heaven, never yet sullied by a drop of unworthy blood. Spurn you, indeed! With all her marvelous beauty and goodness, she may, she must feel the *honor* you confer upon her by such an alliance."

"Were she like others, Cicely, she might thus feel; but there's an atmosphere about her, which seems to preclude every thought of honor or worldly position. I do not think one's birth or standing in society would have the slightest influence upon her feelings."

"She's no woman, then, Walter."

"Rather say she's woman in the highest, holiest, truest sense." Walter's face glowed with emotion as he spoke.

"Why, Walter, who would ever have thought of seeing such a cold, passive being as you are, so madly in love; you've surely lost your senses. But as the surest way of regaining them, I advise you to go at once and make this fair lady your confessor—if she does not smile at your folly, you will find something, if I mistake not, beneath her proud, flashing eye, that will greatly modify your sentimental notions. Only, do not, I pray you, forget what is due to yourself and your family."

"There is little danger of my forgetting that, Cicely; family pride has been too deeply instilled into my veins, to be easily obliterated," Walter replied, somewhat bitterly; "fortunately, Miss Morrison occupies no questionable position, so there will be no scruples upon that score. Were it otherwise, I'd sooner cut my right hand off than undertake to combat mother's prejudices."

"I think she carries them quite too far; even now, she wishes to know more fully Miss Morrison's family history, before you commit yourself. She says she has once or twice tried to question Mrs. Waters upon the subject, but she seemed to evade giving any direct answer. For my part, it is sufficient that she is Mrs. Waters's niece, and both Clarence and I are ready to give her a warm, sisterly welcome."

Walter walked the room with rapid steps for a moment in silence; then suddenly pausing before his sister he exclaimed:

"You may think me a coward or a fool, Cicely, but

I can not, nay, I *dare not*, ask Miss Morrison to become my wife."

"Brave heart! suppose I do it for you, then," Cicely laughingly replied; "I'll throw myself at her feet and cry: 'Have pity, most gracious lady, upon my poor brother, whose very soul is consuming in the fire you've kindled there, but who dares not approach your charmed presence for fear ——'"

"Come, come, Cicely, no more of your bantering; I see you do not understand me," hastily interrupted Walter.

"Then resume your manhood, and act as beseems a brother of mine, and not a love-sick swain," his sister proudly answered; "come, I have a proposition to make to you; next Thursday night, you know, our cards are out, in honor of this reigning belle—let it also be in honor of your affianced bride."

"Would to heaven it might!" exclaimed Walter, leaving the room with a determined look.

An hour later, and he stood in the presence of her whom his heart worshiped. In deep, impassioned tones, he told the story of his love, his hopes, his fears, and then, with trembling earnestness, he plead for a precious boon—her heart and hand.

And she, to whom that proud nature bowed, whose ear drank in the delicious music of his voice as it uttered those fond vows—what thought she then, as she saw her childhood's idol come down from its shrine to bend

before her! The first thrill of electric joy scarce flashed upon her heart, ere a wild and terrible tumult raged within her breast.

"Stay, Mr. Everson," she cried, with a choking voice; "I must not listen to your words; not, at least, till you know to whom you offer such a wealth of affection."

"And do I not know, Nellie? Ever since I saw you upon the mountain, like some enchanting spirit of the air alighted upon that rock, have I loved you—have I watched and waited for this hour, when I might breathe the hope of calling you mine!"

"On the mountain! upon the rock! O Mr. Everson, tell me, tell me what you mean!" The almost agonizing earnestness with which Nellie uttered these words, as she unconsciously grasped his arm, while a gleam of rapturous joy shot from her dark eye, astonished Walter Everson beyond measure.

"Then you did not know I had seen you before I met you at Mrs. Waters'," he said, tenderly taking her hand in his.

Nellie's whole soul seemed concentrated in the gaze she bent upon him, as she asked in husky tones: "Where?"

"It was upon a mountain, Nellie—I did but gaze upon you for a moment and then you fled, but not till you had left your impress on my heart, never yet effaced. But why do you tremble so violently? Can it be, oh! blessed thought! can it be that in that deep emotion, I may read a response to my own unbounded love?

Speak, Nellie—let me at once fold you to my heart and call you mine."

"Leave me now, Mr. Everson; I entreat you to leave me," said Nellie, from whose face every vestige of color had fled as he spoke; "I can not—indeed, I know not what I ought to say. But go now, and I will see you again."

"Your conduct strangely perplexes me, Nellie; if I have said aught to offend you—if I have presumed too much in asking the precious gift of your hand, I pray you to forgive me; but do not drive me from your presence, without one word of hope, unless, indeed, you would consign me to despair."

As he ceased speaking, Nellie raised her head, which she had hid in her hands, and said: "I will not bid you hope for that, which, if you knew all, you might reject with scorn—neither can I lightly set aside your proffered love—give me but one week, and then—then—you shall know."

"It shall be as you say," Walter replied, respectfully raising her hand to his lips; "but oh! remember, Nellie, that with you rests my future happiness or misery"

Like a brilliant star, Nellie had arisen upon the fashionable world, during the gay season which succeeded her release from school. Dazzlingly beautiful and fascinating, with polished manners and highly cultivated mind, it was not surprising that she became the bright cynosure of all hearts and eyes, in whatever circle she

moved, or that, among the noble and gifted, were numbered many suitors for her hand. With a gentle dignity, which won respect and admiration, even while it blasted cherished hopes, did she firmly reject every alliance thus offered. She, too, had her "ideal"—alas for the realization!—but we will not anticipate.

Within the splendid drawing-rooms of Mrs. Everson's aristocratic mansion, was gathered a gay and choice assemblage. Wit and beauty, refinement and culture, marked the brilliant throng, which, as Cicely Willoughby had rightly said, were met in honor of the reigning belle; for Nellie, herself unconscious of the truth, had become the acknowledged queen of taste and beauty. And well she merited the honor, if honor there be in such a distinction, for she possessed the rare tact of combining simplicity with elegance.

Conspicuous among the lovely high-born maidens who graced Mrs. Everson's rooms that evening, she shone in her resplendent beauty. Around her classic head, a glossy braid of raven hair was bound, ornamented only with deep scarlet blossoms, contrasting richly, as they mingled with the silken plaits. A closely-fitting robe of dark velvet displayed the symmetry of her faultless figure, and fell in rich, graceful folds to her feet; and on her breast a magnificent diamond flashed, the only jewel she wore.

"How exquisitely lovely Miss Morrison looks to-night," whispered Cicely Willoughby to her brother; "you must secure her quickly, Walter, or you'll lose

the prize. See how completely your friend Murray is fascinated; he'd be a dangerous competitor, with all his wealth and titled expectations. A woman's heart can scarcely be supposed proof against such temptations."

"She is an exception to all women," Walter replied, as he turned and saw, with a strange thrill of pain, his friend's eye riveted upon Nellie, as though conscious of no other presence there.

"It is as I feared," he muttered bitterly; "he loves her, too! I've seen it from the first. O God! to lose her now!"

"Nellie! bright, peerless Nellie! will you not give me one word of hope! one little word, to save me from despair?" Walter bent low as he murmured thus in Nellie's ear, as she sat among the flowers in the conservatory, whither she had retreated—herself the fairest flower of them all.

A soft light beamed in the maiden's dark eye, as she gently answered: "I dare not bid you hope for what you ask, Mr. Everson, lest it prove not what you seek."

"You speak in riddles, Nellie; I seek but you, and you alone, of all this world; my heart claims kindred with no other. Must it ever dwell alone?"

"I would not lightly wound your feelings, or trifle with a heart so noble," Nellie frankly replied, while a vivid blush mantled her cheek; "to-morrow you shall hear and judge."

"To-morrow, then, let it be," Walter answered, with a happy smile, for something in her conscious blush had

brought him hope and joy; "meanwhile my heart shall revel in its fond anticipations," he added, as he left her side and mingled with the gay throng.

Long Nellie sat among the flowers, concealed from view, living o'er again her strange, eventful life. Long she lingered in that world of thought, unmindful of the mirth and music which reached her outward ear. But suddenly, as the music ceased and the mirth was hushed, the deep tones of a voice, which had power to awaken her from even deeper dreams, aroused her from her reverie.

'Twas a simple story he told to beguile his mother's guests—a tale, oft repeated, of his wild adventures, years ago, among the mountains; yet, as she listened, with every sense painfully tensed, Nellie's face grew livid, and she clenched her hands in mute agony. For he breathed her mother's name in terms of ridicule and contempt—he spoke, too, of *her;* the wild, untamed child, scarcely less hideous to him than the beasts of the mountain—of the motive which had prompted his gift to her; that gift for which she had ever blessed and worshiped him in her heart of hearts; but which she now, with humiliating shame, first learned was given to rid himself from such wretched creatures; he told, too, how those miserable beggars, lured on, no doubt, by his unwise generosity, had traced him to his home—to that very room—how the fortune-teller had pretended to read his doom, and how her frightful-looking child had become terrified by the very picture of her mother's

den, to which he pointed, and they both fled, never again, as he hoped, to return. Much more did he, in tones of bitter irony, add, little dreaming how, like molten lead, they fell upon that young girl's heart—how, root and fiber, they tore his image from her breast.

Nellie listened till he closed; then, in all her glorious beauty, with the light of a holy purpose, a noble resolve shining through her lustrous eyes, she stepped with lofty dignity into the midst of the circle and confronted her lover.

"Yonder," said she, in a clear, sweet voice, pointing to the picture, "is my birthplace; and she, whose kind and tender care saved your life, but whom you have this night branded with scorn and ignominy, bears to me the sacred name of *mother!* I AM WILD NELL!"

CHAPTER XX.

"WHAT joyful harvester did e'er obtain
The sweet fruition of his hopeful gain
Till he in hardy labors first had passed
The summer's heat and stormy winter's blast?
A sable night returns a shining morrow,
And days of joy ensue sad nights of sorrow."

HAD a thunderbolt fallen among them, its effect would have scarcely been more startling than were Nellie's words. For one instant they gazed in blank astonishment at the undaunted girl who so fearlesssly proclaimed her low birth; then the smothered sneer, the scornful look, the scarcely suppressed murmur of malicious triumph, told her that their fiat had gone forth and her fate was sealed. But she quailed not before them all till Walter Everson shrank from her appealing glance paralyzed with horror.

Then nature, overwrought, yielded, and she would have sunk at his feet had not a strong arm caught and tenderly supported her fainting form.

"Noble, heroic girl!" exclaimed Murray, casting a glance of ineffable disgust around as he bore Nellie

from the room; "such sublime courage finds no response from a heartless world."

"Heaven bless you for this, Mr. Murray," said Mrs. Waters while they gently laid Nellie's still unconscious form upon the sofa in the dressing-room; "friendship in such an hour is indeed most precious; and I may with truth add, most rare."

"Would that I had but the *right* to protect her! would to heaven that my name and hand might shield her from their pitiless scorn!" Mr. Murray exclaimed with an earnestness which caused Mrs. Waters to pause in her efforts to restore Nellie and turn with unfeigned astonishment towards him.

"You have my secret now," he continued, while a rich glow spread over his manly cheek; "which, but for this denouement, might ever have remained concealed within my own breast. Let me add then, Mrs. Waters, that this night has deepened my love for that noble girl almost to idolatry — has exalted her to even a higher and holier place in my heart than before. Oh! that the priceless treasure of her love had been mine!"

A languid movement of returning consciousness from Nellie caused him to withdraw quickly before Mrs. Waters had time to reply. A grateful smile, however, still rested upon her face as Nellie slowly unclosed her eyes and fixed them upon her.

"O Aunt Waters!" she cried mournfully, "how can you smile? It is so terrible! Repudiated, scorned, loathed, cast off! O my God! help me to bear

it all!" and she closed her hands tightly across her eyes.

"Nellie, my dear girl, all is not lost. I feel it, I *know* it; and I smile, nay, I could almost shout for joy that you have achieved such a noble, such a glorious triumph to-night."

"A triumph! Aunt Waters? Say, rather, my ruin, my desolation, *my death!*"

"Is it ruin or desolation to gain such a victory over one's self, Nellie? Is it death to rise superior to the world's smile or frown? Reflect a moment, my dear girl, upon the step you have taken. Would you retract? would your love even tempt you back to him who closed his heart against you when most you needed its protection? No, believe me, Nellie, you will yet thank God, as I do, that you faltered not when your hour of trial came."

"You are right! Aunt Waters!" cried Nellie, springing to her feet with sudden energy, while a glow of filial love illumined her eye; "they may scorn me if they will, but they shall know that a mother's name is dear to the child of the forest, and that she fears not to share her humble lot. Come, let us go; I can not longer breathe beneath this roof. Thus end all my dearly cherished dreams, and I go forth to a future dark and cheerless; but a Father's hand will lead me through, and his love will light the dreary way."

"Now you are my own Nellie again. Retain ever that simple truthfulness of heart, that firm reliance on Almighty strength, and you have nothing to fear. Yes, we will go; Mrs. Everson will doubtless understand and excuse our abrupt departure. To-morrow I shall deem an explanation with her necessary."

"To-morrow," thought Nellie as they rode home in silence; "with what fond anticipations did I but one short hour ago, look forward to its approach! and now, alas! 'tis all a dreary blank to me."

Meantime Nellie and her strange history became the theme of many a passing jest and bitter, envious remark among those who had witnessed her sudden eclaircissement. Especially did Mrs. Everson and her daughter pour forth in no measured terms their indignation at the imposition which had been practiced upon them. That a lady of Mrs. Waters's standing should have introduced a girl of low birth into their society was almost past belief.

"She, too, must have been deceived by the artful creature," Cicely Willoughby exclaimed in answer to such a suggestion; "I can not believe she would knowingly insult us."

"I have heard it remarked," said one with a slight sneer, "that Mrs. Waters has some very peculiar relations of her own; who knows but this may be one of them?"

"That reminds me," added another, "of a clownish-

looking doctor who visited her some years since, and whom she unblushingly introduced as her sister's husband."

"I remember him well," said a lady whose frank, open face mirrored her soul; "he was a man of strong good sense, notwithstanding his bluntness, and one whose relationship no one need blush to own. I wish society had many more such."

"Perhaps, then, you would not object to a person in Miss Morrison's position being retained in society," pertly rejoined a faded beauty.

"*I* certainly should not," replied the lady; "the moral courage she has exhibited here to-night entitles her to our highest respect and admiration whatever may have been her antecedents."

"Excuse me," interrupted Mrs. Everson, who had overheard the last remark; "but I think we are all in danger of allowing our sympathies to blind our judgment; we must not yield to momentary enthusiasm, as I confess I was tempted to do this evening, if we would maintain the good order of society."

"In what do you conceive 'the good order of society' to consist, Mrs. Everson?" asked the other with a quiet smile.

"In every one's knowing and keeping their proper position," Mrs. Everson replied warmly. "If, for instance, this Miss Morrison had been kept within her own sphere, she would never have presumed to raise

her eyes so high, and we should have been spared the scene we have just witnessed."

"Nature has a nobility of her own," rejoined the lady; "and I think Miss Morrison may justly claim a high rank there, however at variance it may be with the artificial notions of fashionable society. What could be more queenly than her bearing to-night! what more noble than her ingenuous declaration of her parentage!"

"You are almost as enthusiastic in her praise as Mr. Murray," exclaimed a beautiful girl, drawing near. "I have just been listening to his eulogy upon her immaculate goodness. Heigh ho! how nice it must be to become such a heroine!"

"A heroine, Aggie?" repeated Mrs. Everson, turning quickly towards her; "I hope you do not dignify Miss Morrison with such a title. Say, rather, an impostor, a shameless adventurer."

"I do not believe your son judges her so harshly," the young lady archly replied.

"My son doubtless estimates her as she deserves," Mrs. Everson rejoined, glancing her eye uneasily around the room as she spoke. "Have you seen him lately, Aggie?"

"Seen him! Oh! yes, poor, disconsolate swain; he's in the conservatory bemoaning the loss of his lady love," was the mischievous reply as the fair girl glided away among the throng.

Mrs. Everson was too much a woman of the world

to suffer her equanimity to be disturbed in the presence of others. She therefore moved along with a calm, self-possessed manner towards the conservatory, but a close observer might have seen by the nervous twitching of her mouth, and the unnatural fire in her eye, that some sudden thought or fear had taken possession of her. Quietly and cautiously she proceeded, omitting none of the courtesies she so well know how to bestow upon her guests, until, at length, she came within the sound of her son's voice, where, unobserved, she could both watch and listen.

The ashy paleness of Walter's cheek, as he spoke in low, excited tones to his friend Murray, sent a pang through her heart. What if, after all, he should persist in his romantic attachment to Nellie, and thus bring disgrace upon their family name! What if, in his deep love for the beautiful girl, he should prove recreant to every principle of honor, and wed one so infinitely beneath him!

Thus thought and reasoned that worldly-minded mother as she looked upon her son, forgetting, for the moment, how deeply she had imbued that son's spirit with her own, and how fully his nature sympathized with hers.

A few words, however, which reached her quickened ear removed at once her fears, and brought a gleam of intense satisfaction to her face.

It was apparently in answer to some remonstrance

from his friend that Walter sprang to his feet and exclaimed passionately:

"Heaven knows I wish you were right, Murray, but your views would never be tolerated here. Society, habit, education — every thing is against them, and I am not one to trample on such powerful opponents."

"Then you do not love her as you ought — as she deserves to be loved, Everson," Murray replied with deep feeling.

"God is my witness, Murray," cried Walter, laying his hand upon his heart, "that never dwelt a truer devotion or deeper love in man's heart than I have given to her; nay, *I love her still!*"

"And yet you will see her crushed before your very eyes and not hold out your hand to save her! You will spurn the noble heart you have won because, forsooth! you think her name more humble than your own!"

"Spare your reproaches, Murray; they only add to the bitterness of this hour. Should you ever love as I have done, and see your idol torn from you by inexorable fate, you will know what I suffer now."

"Are society's laws, then, so inexorable that its Juggernaut wheels can not be staid? O Walter! Walter! will you cast *her* forth, a victim to such false codes? her whose love would purify and exalt any station on earth?"

"No more! Murray! no more, I beseech of you, if

you would not drive me mad!" exclaimed Walter, turning away; "I must submit to my fate."

"And you will not marry her, now that all others forsake?"

"No, I can not; it shall never be said that I dishonored my father's name by wedding a low fortune-teller's daughter," Walter replied decidedly.

"Then hear me, Walter Everson!" cried Murray, his whole frame trembling with excitement as he moved towards the door, "I can no longer number among my friends one whose soul seems lost to every true and noble impulse. Take care that no fouler blot ever rests upon your boasted name than she, a pure, beauteous, loving bride would bring. But you have proved yourself all unworthy such a prize. Farewell!"

Walter turned as his friend left him, and met his mother's smiling approval.

"Let him go," said she; "he will soon be convinced of his folly and return to make suitable apologies. You have maintained yourself honorably, my son."

"'Tis well to have the sanction of one's judgment," he replied bitterly, "let the heart rebel as it will."

"O Nellie! Nellie!" was the wailing cry his heart sent up through the midnight silence of his lonely vigils when all around had sunk to rest, "how can I give thee up! Around every fiber of my being have the love-tendrils crept which bind thee to me! Must they be torn away, and I live bereft of thee? No! no! it can not be! 'twas but an illusion, a terrible dream

that placed that yawning gulf between us. Yet 'twas thine own voice which uttered those words; thy voice that never yet breathed aught but purest truth; 'twas thine own hand that pointed to the bridgeless chasm and paralyzed my heart! Oh! the dreary, dreary future! what shall it give me in exchange for the bright hopes I've lost? How can the world e'er repay the sacrifice I make! Nellie, thou'rt lost to me forever, but in my soul I worship thee as the purest, highest type of womanhood e'er given to earth? Why, ah! why didst thou so proudly proclaim thy adverse birth, which sealed my doom! Why didst thou stand before me in thy celestial radiance, like some accusing angel, with pen uplifted to transcribe my heart! Alas! the record is made, and we are severed — thou to move on in all thy glorious light and loveliness, unmindful of the world's applause or hate; while I, poor, wretched fool, must heed its every nod — obey its slightest word. Such is the stern decree to which I must submit! such the fate to which I bow!"

CHAPTER XXI.

"I WONDER if the bliss that flows to me
In youth, shall be exhaled and scorched up dry
By the noonday glare of life."

BEFORE a cheerful wood-fire, though it was in the month of May, Esther Cram sat pillowed in an easy chair, her pale, wan face resting in thoughtful mood upon her wasted hand, while every now and then she cast a glance of affectionate solicitude upon the young girl who moved noiselessly around the room, arranging in her own tasteful way the simple, scant furniture, till an air of comfort, and almost elegance, pervaded the apartment. For a long time, on that bright May morning, had each been silently busied with her own thoughts — the warm golden rays which flooded the nicely sanded floor reminding one of former days of gladness and joy, while to the other they but made darker, by contrast, the trials through which she was passing.

Like the dove of old, Nellie had returned from her wearisome flight over the dreary waste of waters without to the sheltering ark from which she had flown.

She had sought with yearning heart that blessed haven where many a sorrow has been lulled to rest—she had lain upon *a mother's breast*, and felt the soft tears of sympathy and love fall upon her wounded spirit, till its grief and woe were softened to endurance. But, alas! another woe had arisen, threatening even greater desolation than that through which she had just passed. The fell destroyer's stealthy steps hovered around that humble dwelling; already his consuming touch had caused the hardened frame, which for long years had defied the winter's blast and summer's scorching heat, to waste away with slow disease. Consumption, New-England's fatal scourge, had fastened upon its victim relentlessly, hopelessly; and Esther Cram knew that her days on earth were numbered!

Some faint overshadowing, too, had Nellie of the fearful truth, since her return, yet to her the evil day seemed still afar off; she could not, she would not contemplate the dreadful separation as drawing inevitably and rapidly near. Yet so it was; and no warm, glad rays of sunshine, no perfume of spring flowers, so carefully culled each day, to tell the sick one of earth's return to verdure and beauty, could chase the cold shadow from their hearth.

"Mother, dear mother," said Nellie at length, breaking the silence, as she threw herself upon a little stool at Esther Cram's feet, "do you not long to go out this beautiful spring morning, and breathe again the fresh warm air? The birds are singing their sweetest songs,

and from every nook on the dear old mountain peep forth these fragrant violets as if to watch for your coming."

"Sweet flowers! they have gladdened many an hour of my life," Esther Cram replied, raising a bunch of the sweet-scented blossoms to her face; "but they will bloom no more for me, save on my grave."

"O mother! don't, don't!" cried Nellie, the tears springing quickly to her eyes; "I can not bear to hear you speak so!"

"Were it not for you, dear child, I would lie down in my grave as a tired child sleeps upon its mother's breast. Only think, Nellie, there the weary are at rest! there no trouble nor sorrow comes—no grief nor despair to blight the heart! Blessed, blessed repose!" A smile of almost unearthly radiance rested upon her withered, time-worn features, as Esther Cram fervently raised her clasped hands and eyes to heaven.

"Take me with you, mother! oh! take me with you, for I am weary and would find rest.'

That yearning cry brought back the mother's thoughts to earth, and gently laying her hand upon her child's head, she said:

"You have yet a work to do, Nellie—a long and it may be a weary path to tread—but remember, my child, however dark and drear your life may seem, 'tis but a moment's span compared with that which is to come."

"With you ever near to guide and comfort me, mo-

ther, I could bear to live and suffer, let my way be ever so thorny; but to be alone in all this world, with none to love or care for me, oh! 'tis too dreadful!" Nellie hid her face in her hands and shuddered as she spoke.

"You will not be left thus alone, my child; there are those whose love will bring you more happiness than ever mine could do. Heaven will not suffer such a sacrifice as you have made to go unrewarded."

"I have made no sacrifice, mother."

"Not in exchanging the caresses of wealth and fashion for the lowly home and fortunes of your poor old mother?"

"No; a mother's name is dearer to her child than aught else."

"And you do not regret the step you have taken—the choice you have made?" Esther Cram bent an eager glance upon her daughter as she questioned her thus.

"No, mother; I can never regret that I obeyed the promptings of my heart, and I never could be happy in a life of deception, even to secure the love of friends I prize."

"One question more, Nellie—and I charge you to answer me truly, as in the sight of God: *Do you love Walter Everson?*"

A shiver ran through Nellie's frame as she replied, in low, tremulous tones: "I have loved him, mother, oh! so wildly, so passionately! In my blindness, I invested him with every perfection; but from that blissful delu-

sion I was rudely awakened. No, mother," and her voice grew firm and strong, "*I love him not.*"

"Now may heaven be praised, that my child has escaped the snare!" cried Esther Cram, with unwonted emotion; "you have brought a fullness of comfort to my heart, Nellie, of which you little dream. Had the son possessed but one tithe of his father's noble, generous spirit, I could have blessed your love for him; but *pride*—the Everson heritage, at once their birthright and curse—has fallen to him in no measured degree."

"You speak as if you had known them," said Nellie with surprise.

"Ay, that I have, my child! 'twas from their hands I drained the bitter chalice which turned my blood to gall and made me the wretched thing I was for years. 'Tis meet that you should know all now, Nellie, that in your humiliation you should have the proud satisfaction of feeling that in your veins flows the blood of an ancestry as high and honored at least as Walter Everson can boast."

Drawing closer to her mother's side, Nellie listened with almost breathless astonishment to the tale, now first revealed to her ear, of the blight which had changed a beautiful, loving maiden to the despised, scorned, almost *unhumanized* fortune-teller—and that maiden, that fortune-teller, was her own mother!

With a heaving breast and swimming eye, she listened to the close, and as the tears fell thick and fast, she

clasped that mother's hand with emotion too deep for utterance.

"Gim-i-*ni!* here they are, all in the mopes," cried a cheerful voice, as Dr. Jepson came bustling in; "hey-day, old lady, we don't want April showers in May. Come, cheer up; I've brought an old friend to see you. We're just in the nick of time, Mr. Murray; walk right in, and do your best to comfort them."

Before Nellie could recover from her amazement at the sudden interruption, Mr. Murray stood before her.

"I must beg your pardon, Miss Morrison," said he, extending his hand with a cordiality which touched Nellie's heart, "for what I fear is an unwelcome intrusion."

"Pooh! nonsense! it is no such thing," said the Doctor, "she's right glad to see you—an't you, Nellie?"

"'Tis so unexpected," stammered Nellie, greatly embarrassed; "I had not thought I should ever see Mr. Murray again."

"Any body would think from your looks and words that you never wished to—but I know better. You are just the one to appreciate a kindness, and I'm sure Mr. Murray is wonderfully kind in coming so far to see you." The Doctor's merry blue eye twinkled as he spoke.

"Miss Morrison doubtless feels that an apology is due her for my presence here this morning," said Mr. Murray; "suffer me, therefore, to say at once that I could not leave this country, as I intend shortly to do,

without tendering her my sympathy and admiration for the noble course she pursued in the trying circumstances in which I last saw her; and especially did I wish to thank this excellent woman for a lesson once received, a seed sown by chance, which I trust has brought forth fruit, though it fell on barren soil. Perhaps you remember, madam, a short interview with two young men in quest of adventures, upon yonder mountain, some four years since?"

The respectful, delicate manner in which he alluded to and addressed her mother, at once relieved Nellie's embarrassment and filled her with grateful emotion.

"I remember it well," Esther Cram replied, extending her hand warmly to the young man; "and I also remember the widely different manner with which my words were received. But he who turned away in scorn may live to feel their truth. Thank God, if to one heart they were blessed!"

"That scene and its results will never be effaced from my mind," continued Mr. Murray; "for days and weeks the awful truths you uttered haunted me, till I learned to receive them in faith and hope. What do I not owe you for thus leading me to the light?"

"The joy of knowing that I have been the humble instrument of bringing peace to your soul is indeed great, and will fill my last days with unspeakable comfort. May God bless you for thus lighting my path down to the grave," Mrs. Cram added fervently.

"I trust, for your daughter's sake at least, that you have many years of life yet before you," said Mr. Murray.

"For her sake, life would indeed be dear to me," Esther Cram replied; "but when the Master calls, no earthly tie has power to bind us here—I feel that I am fast going, sir."

"We shan't spare her just yet, Mr. Murray," cheerfully chimed in the Doctor; "it will soon be warm enough to move her up on the mountain she loves so well, and the pure air there will, I hope, strengthen her. My girl here, too, needs something to bring back the roses to her cheeks."

Mr. Murray had scarcely ventured a glance at Nellie since he entered the room, but now, as he turned towards her and saw what a change a few short weeks had made in her once smiling, happy face, he longed to clasp her to his heart and chase away the sorrows there.

The Doctor's quick eye read these thoughts, and with an inward pleasure he could scarce conceal, he mischievously added:

"Come, my good friend, what shall I give you to remain here a few weeks and help me cure up these patients of mine? They are ten per cent better now, for our call this morning—I think you would prove a powerful auxiliary in this case, certain. What say you, Nellie? two doctors are better than one, hey?"

"Yes, if they do not disagree," playfully retorted

Nellie; "but seriously, I feel deeply grateful to Mr. Murray for his kind remembrance of my mother. We shall neither of us forget it, I assure you, sir."

"Why don't you thank him for remembering you too?" the Doctor asked quizzically.

"Thanks are scarcely due," Mr. Murray quickly rejoined, to spare Nellie the awkwardness of replying; "where the pleasure conferred is so great as that which connects itself with my remembrance of Miss Morrison. The debt of gratitude is mine and I would fain increase it, by begging permission to repeat my call occasionally, while I remain in this region."

A request so modestly preferred met at once a cordial response from Esther Cram, and a heartfelt though less demonstrative assent from Nellie, and Augustus Murray left her presence that morning more deeply in love than ever. Prospective heir to vast possessions and titled honors, gladly would he have exchanged these earthly hopes for a place in that young girl's heart.

"I'll tell you what 'tis, Betsy," said Doctor Jepson, as he retired to rest that night, "this Mr. Murray han't come all the way up here for nothing—he's dead in love with our Nellie, certain. I'm afraid he won't make much impression upon her though; her heart has been set so long upon young Everson. But he seems like a nice sort of a fellow, and I'll help him along. Gim-i-*ni!* if I don't!"

"I should be very glad if Nellie's mind could be diverted from her troubles," Mrs. Jepson replied, "but

she will never love another as she has loved Walter Everson."

"May be not, wife, but she's a good, sensible girl enough to see the difference between that heartless fellow and a true, noble soul like Murray's—and, depend upon't, she will yet see and feel it too."

Mrs. Jepson shook her head incredulously. "First love can never be obliterated," said she, "and Nellie has worshiped him from childhood."

"But her idol destroyed himself before her—he absolutely left her nothing to love, wife."

"True, husband; nothing but the ruins of what was once to her a temple of beauty and perfection—yet, womanlike, she will still cling to those relics of her precious golden life-dream."

"We shall see, Betsy; but I hope she'll have sense enough not to let her whole life be embittered by a foolish fondness for one who so heartlessly deserted her."

CHAPTER XXII.

"A FOUL inheritance—a mother's pride!
Descended, nourished in my blood;
My hope before, now fatal!
My idol gone, my life a blank, my
Wreck a warning to the voyager
Who ventures out with such a
Treacherous guide."

IN her richly-furnished drawing-room, whose soft velvet carpet muffled each quick footfall, and through whose gorgeously draperied windows the crimson light fell with a subdued glow, Mrs. Everson paced back and forth, her whole frame trembling with a violent agitation, which contrasted strangely with her usual calm, placid demeanor. For a long time had she been thus battling with the fearful tempest within—wrestling with a mortal foe, invisible yet all-powerful; now, defiantly thrusting her clenched hands forth with determined vengeance—then, melting into moaning sobs and tears, which seemed to rend her heart well-nigh asunder. 'Twas a dread strife 'twixt maternal love and woman's pride—all the latent tenderness of the former quickened into life by her sleepless, untiring vigils at the bedside

of her only son, whose delirious ravings had revealed the hopeless secret of his heart to her gaze, and all the strength of the latter roused into action to combat the yearning desire, the half-formed resolve of *the mother* to bring back health and happiness to her child at whatever cost. Alternating thus, between the instinctive promptings of her heart and that almost equally potent pride which had become her second nature, Mrs. Everson walked with rapid steps up and down the spacious apartment, taking no note of time, though the quickly-passing moments grew into hours, while still the fierce war waged within her breast.

"Alas! alas!" at length she cried aloud, throwing herself upon a soft-cushioned chair; "to what an extremity am I reduced! to give my son to the grave or to dishonor! 'Tis a terrible alternative—to lose the joy, comfort, and support of my declining years—to live on a cheerless, childless existence—or to have that existence ever cursed by such a disgrace! No! better death a thousand times, than spot or tarnish on a proud, unsullied name. I had hoped to see *my son* take his place among the high and honored of the land—to hear the name he alone perpetuates lauded by the great and powerful; but all my fond anticipations must now end in despair. Oh! the wretched viper, thus to sting the hand whose misguided kindness placed her where she is! What would she now have been, had not he, in his thoughtless folly, led to her enlightenment? and now, the presumptuous, low-minded, base-born girl has so

bewitched him that he must wed her or die! Must I yield to this madness, or weep upon the grave of my only son, my first-born, my idolized child? No, no, it can not, must not be! heaven will avert the dreadful blow, and spare my son to me."

A low knock, twice, thrice repeated, ere it reached her ear, aroused the wretched woman from her reverie, and with something of her old haughty demeanor, she arose to greet the entrance of their family-physician.

"What report do you bring from your patient this morning, doctor?" she asked, with a sickly attempt at a smile.

"Not very favorable, I am sorry to say, madam," he replied, shaking his head; "your son's malady is greatly increased by his mental disquietude; indeed, if the latter be not speedily removed, I have serious fears of the consequences."

Mrs. Everson made no reply, and with a quiet decision of manner, which added weight to his words, the doctor continued:

"You will pardon me, I am confident, where the life of a fellow-being, and that your only son, is, it may be, at stake, if I speak plainly and without constraint to you upon this subject. Indeed, I should neglect an imperative duty did I not thus speak. It lies in your power, Mrs. Everson, to do far more for your son's restoration than my skill can possibly effect. Were you to enter with ready sympathy into all his feelings,

hopes, and wishes with regard to the young lady for whom he has conceived such a strong passion ——"

"Excuse me, doctor," Mrs. Everson interrupted, drawing herself up haughtily, "if I decline making this a subject of discussion between us. My son agrees with me perfectly in my views, and though he may suffer for a time, indignation at the gross deception which has been practiced upon him will, in the end, annihilate this foolish passion."

"You are mistaken, madam," the doctor earnestly rejoined; "believe me, you are mistaken. Were your son less mature in years and judgment, it might be so; but when a strong man like him loves, and loves worthily, it is for a lifetime. He can not, he never will forget this passion, even if his life be spared from the danger which now threatens it."

"What would you have me do, doctor?" Beneath the haughty exterior there was, after all, *a heart*, which caused the words to tremble on her lips, as she uttered them, and emboldened the doctor to reply:

"Do? I would have you cast off the false masks and trammels of society, and follow the simple guidings of nature. I would have you go to your son, and laying your hand upon his throbbing temples, soothe the delirious ravings of his brain by that quiet, effective sympathy which dwells in every woman's heart. Tell him that, with a mother's love, you will receive and bless the beautiful maiden so worthy of his love. Tell him,

what in your own soul you know to be true, that thus you will secure to yourself and home a blessing with which the world's friendship could not compare, that the integrity of your name can not be lessened by a union with such purity and goodness. Do this—remove the burden from his heart, which, by your early teachings, you have helped to place there, and your son is saved to honor and happiness; *do it not*, and what shall be the whisperings of your conscience, when the world writes you childless?"

Without waiting to witness the effect of his words, Doctor Baylies quickly withdrew, wisely leaving the haughty, worldly woman, to receive or reject them, *alone.*

For a few moments Mrs. Everson stood where he had left her, her hands tightly clenched and her breast heaving with varied emotions; then, with irresolute steps, while still the dark shadow rested on her heart, she sought the chamber of sickness, where, alternately tossing in the delirium of fever or sinking with reactive exhaustion, the joy and pride of her life helplessly lay.

It was in the latter state she found him, as, softly approaching the bed, she laid her hand upon his burning brow.

"How is he now?" she whispered to the attendant.

"Not a whit better, ma'am—he's had one o' his worst spells, since you was out; he won't last long at this rate, that's for certain," the nurse replied, with an emphatic nod.

"I will watch beside him now and release you for a while," said Mrs. Everson, waving her hand towards the door as she seated herself at the bedside.

"Please, ma'am, the doctor says we must keep him very quiet—any excitement might be fatal to him," the nurse whispered, turning to go.

"Yes, I understand."

"And he said, too, that he thought the crisis was fast approaching."

"Yes—yes—you can go now," Mrs. Everson spoke abstractedly, gazing all the while like one in a dream upon the pallid cheek and sunken eye of the sick one, with the doctor's words still ringing in her ear.

"Has she gone, mother?" feebly asked Walter.

"She has, my son—but I thought you were asleep," Mrs. Everson replied, alarmed lest he should have heard their conversation.

"No, mother, I have not slept for hours; I felt, even before the doctor said it, that a terrible danger impended; 'tis a fearful thing to look death in the face, mother."

"You must not dwell upon such a subject, Walter; any agitation or excitement will increase your danger; think of life, not death, my son."

"There is nothing in life to make it a bright or pleasant thought to me now. Oh! how a sick-bed changes one's views of the world and its follies! You must let me talk now, mother; it may be my last opportunity, and I can not die without telling you how vain, weak,

and sinful now seem to me the motives by which we have been guided in life—how like mockery the pride with which we have puffed ourselves up over a few paltry grains of gold. In the hour of death, mother, what think you will name, or station, or wealth avail?"

"Walter, Walter, how strangely you talk! These are but the vagaries of disease, which returning health will dissipate; I must give you an opiate, to quiet and calm your thoughts."

"The best opiate you could give me, mother, would be the assurance that you feel as I now do—that hereafter you will be governed by a higher principle in your feelings and conduct."

"I must absolutely forbid your saying any thing more, my son; your fever has already increased. When you are better, we will talk further upon the subject if you wish, but now ——"

"Now, while we are alone and my mind is clear, I must unburden my heart, mother. It has been made all plain to me since I lay here, sometimes haunted by strange fancies and sometimes catching a gleam from the light of truth, how deeply I, in my blind folly, have wronged a noble, trusting heart. Promise me, mother, that when I am gone, you will bear to Nellie my last blessing. Let no false pride restrain you from telling her how unworthy of her exalted love your son felt himself to be—how, in his sick-chamber, looking back upon the past few years, he cherished her memory with remorseful tenderness, longing to breathe into her ear

his penitence, sorrow, and undying love. Will you do this, mother?"

Walter Everson gazed earnestly at his mother's bowed head, as his tremulous voice ceased, but no sound issued from her lips.

"Speak quick, mother, ere these calm moments flee—ere your face mingles with the gaunt specters that troop around my bed. See! they are coming, coming! hold them back, Nellie! hold them back! say, mother, will you? will you?"

Pride yielded at last, as Mrs. Everson sprang with streaming eyes towards her son. "I will do all you wish, Walter; nay more, you shall see her, and bless her with your own breath."

Walter cast a quick, half-bewildered glance upon her; then, as her meaning broke upon him, a joyful smile lighted up his face, chasing from thence the demon of madness but a moment before threatening to possess him.

"Heaven bless you for those words, mother," he cried; "to see her! to hear from her own lips the forgiveness I would so humbly crave—to know that she is near me—that we breathe the same air! If any thing on earth could restore me to life, it would be this."

"Be calm, my son, and your wishes shall be fulfilled. Yes, let the sacrifice be what it may, it shall be done."

"Don't speak of sacrifice, mother! earth holds no treasure to be compared with Nellie's pure, truthful

love. Yet I cast it from me, poor blinded fool that I was! how can the priceless gift e'er be recalled?"

"Please, ma'am," interrupted the nurse, putting her head in at the door, "shan't I come and take your place? I'm afraid the young man is talking too much; the doctor said he must be quiet, you know."

"You're right, nurse," Mrs. Everson replied. "Yes, you may come now. 'Tis better so, my son," she added in a low voice, as Walter remonstrated; "too much agitation might be attended with serious consequences, and you have something to live for now, you know." There was a sad, half-reproachful smile on her face as she said this, which caused Walter to exclaim, as he grasped her hand:

"If I live, it will be to bless my generous, noble-hearted mother. Do not leave me yet—not at least till you have said when I may see *her*."

"That I can not do, for I know not where she is; but comfort yourself with this assurance, my son—that wherever she may be I will seek her, and so plead your cause that your heart's desire shall be gained and Nellie restored to you."

With a wild cry of delight, Walter stretched forth his arms, as if to clasp the loved one already to his heart.

"You must excuse me, ma'am, but this 'll never do," said the nurse decidedly, laying the sick man's head back upon the pillow and covering it with wet band-

ages; "brain-fevers have to be carefully managed, especially when folks are subject to 'em, as he is."

"Never mind these, nurse," cried Walter, tearing off the bandages in his transport; "one sight of her dear face will do more for me than all things else. O Nellie! Nellie! monster that I was, to turn from thee in thy hour of need, shall I indeed receive thy forgiveness and be restored to happiness and thee?"

"You'll just please to take these drops, Mister Everson; I must do my duty, whether you do yours or not. It's no use your worrying so about that gal; if you're to have her, you will, and if you an't, you won't, do what you will. So now make yourself easy and quiet a bit, or you'll just be sure of never seeing her."

Walter swallowed the opiate she held to his lips, with a smile at the woman's logic, and soon sank into a deep, refreshing slumber.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"'Wilt thou to one, exacting all that I
Have lost the right to ask for, still extend
Forgiveness on forgiveness, with that sigh
That dreads the end?'

"'Ay, madam, here alone
You may think, till your heart is broken,
Of the love that is dead and done,
Of the days that, with no token,
For evermore are gone.'"

Home again! once more beneath the humble roof which had sheltered so many years of her eventful life; surrounded, not as of old, by the grim and ghastly specters of her own creation, but by such simple comforts as willing, loving hands could minister, Esther Cram breathed again the longed-for fresh mountain air —looked forth again, from the low window by her bed, upon the wild scenery in which she had so often reveled. The same voices spoke from out the mountain forest, the same winds sighed and moaned around her dwelling as in years agone she had listened to their nightly wail; yet how changed their meaning to her ear! *Then* their wild, discordant notes told of misery and woe, of burning hatred, dark revenge, *resistless*

fate; then, ofttimes, reason tottered on its throne, giving unearthly hue and shape to nature's simplest forms — hearing in each passing breeze some familiar spirit's call. *Now*, in the glorious light revealed within her soul, one voice, one spirit, pervaded earth and air; 'twas the voice of love, the spirit of peace breathing heavenly music upon her enraptured senses. No more the hardened skeptic, the bitter scoffer, the world-hater, but a simple, believing child of God, waiting, in trusting faith, her loving summons home.

Who could recognize in her pale, worn face, with its subdued, chastened expression, or in the patient, gentle manner with which she bore her sufferings, the gaunt, repulsive fortune-teller, with her croaking voice and sneering words, as first we saw her within that hut! And the wretched hovel, too, through whose door we shudderingly crept, has been transformed into a neat, cheerful, though still lowly abode. The snowy curtains, the bed of unrivaled whiteness, the nicely scoured and sanded floors, were the work of Molly's hands—Molly, the faithful wife of our old friend John, whose vituperations against the "old witch" all ended at last in a devoted attachment and inseparable service. It was his hand which had trained the creeping vines around the sides and up the roof of the little hut, till it looked like some rustic bower covered with fragrant, blushing flowers. He, too, was it whose true artistic taste had laid out the thrifty garden with its narrow border of bright blossoms. But not all Molly's industry or John's zeal

could have served to throw around the humble dwelling such an air of refinement and taste as pervaded every nook. Exquisitely arranged bouquets of wild mountain flowers, with petals dripping in all the freshness of the mountain dew, were each day placed by gentle, tender hands around the sick one's couch; delicate ministrations, such alone as watchful love could give, made soft the bed of suffering and disease. To Nellie was it given thus to make the rude home of her childhood a happy, peaceful resting-place at last — thus to smooth and beguile, with filial love and tender care, the dark, drear passage to the grave.

'Twas a bright, glowing June day. Delicious breezes, laden with the perfume of innumerable flowers, swept through the mountain forest, around the rocks, and into every penetrable glade and dell. Softly they stole through the open window of the little solitary home and played with the silver locks or fanned the pallid brow of one who was wont to hail their coming with delight.

With a languid smile the sick one raised her head.

"Blessed breath of heaven," she murmured, "what message do ye bring from that bright land? Soon, on your wings, my soul shall mount to its abode. O happy hour! my waiting spirit longs for its approach."

"Mrs. Cram," said Molly, opening the door, "there's a lady here as wishes to see ye. Shall I ask her in?"

Supposing it to be some one from the village below

who thus remembered her in her sickness, Mrs. Cram replied:

"Certainly, Molly. She is very kind, I'm sure."

What, then, was her surprise when Molly ushered in a tall, dignified lady richly dressed, who advanced with a stately air towards the bed. For a moment their eyes met as in mutual scrutiny. On the part of the visitor there was evidently a constrained effort to bring herself down to a level with the other, which at once aroused Esther Cram's native pride and caused her to greet the stranger somewhat coolly.

"I am aware," said the latter, "that an apology is due for my presence here; yet when I tell you that I come from the sick-bed of an only son to bear the desire of his heart to you and yours in that which most deeply concerns his happiness, if not his life, you may perhaps appreciate and excuse what otherwise might be deemed an unpardonable intrusion."

"Your words are a perfect enigma to me," the sick woman replied; "pray explain yourself."

"First let me ask if you remember an incident which occurred many years ago upon this mountain, in which a young man, seriously injured, became the recipient of your kind attention and care."

"Remember it? that I do!" Esther Cram quickly replied, with a curious, astonished glance at the questioner.

"My son never forgot his obligations," the other began.

"Your son!" exclaimed the sick woman, springing up with unnatural energy and gazing wildly in her visitor's face; "were you, then, Arthur's wife — the mother of *his* children?"

Blank astonishment overpowered for the moment every other thought and feeling as Mrs. Everson heard her husband's name so familiarly pronounced by such lips.

"What knew you of him?" at length she asked. "Oh! I might have known; Walter has doubtless told you something of our family history."

"Before your son ever saw the light, or you became a wedded wife, I knew Arthur Everson — yes, and his haughty mother, too."

"When she was telling fortunes through the country, I presume," thought Mrs. Everson, and the humiliation of such an alliance sent a bitter pang through her heart. Yet she had promised Walter, and nothing should shake her determination now to secure his happiness, so she merely replied:

"Your knowledge, then, precludes the necessity of any personal explanation from me and renders my task a simple one. My son knows and loves your daughter, and I have come in his behalf to ask her hand in marriage."

"'Tis not for us to decide our children's fate," said Esther Cram, while conflicting emotions burned within her breast. "Nellie alone must answer your request."

"Certainly; but as she would doubtless be guided in

a great measure by your wishes, I thought it best to confer with you first."

"Allow me to ask if your son's choice meets the approbation of your own judgment and wishes?"

'Twas a close question, and Mrs. Everson bit her lips ere she replied.

"I will frankly confess that more equality of birth would have pleased me better; but, as you say, we must not decide for our children, and my son's happiness seems so wholly centered in your daughter that I would fain urge his suit, if need be, with all the strength and earnestness I can command."

Esther Cram must have been more than human not to have felt, for the moment at least, a gleam of exultation over the haughty woman before her. It was indeed an hour of triumph when that pride, which had been the bane of her life, was laid at her feet — when her jewel was at last sought as a priceless treasure by those who had contemned its rough setting. Once she would have repulsed the messenger with bitter words and sneering taunts, but now she only said:

"'Tis to my daughter you must present your suit; her happiness alone is now my care; that secured, my few remaining days would be filled with peace and joy. Hark! I hear her coming now. Even our mountain birds seem rivaled by her songs."

As she ceased speaking, the soft and bird-like tones of a sweet voice reached their ear, and Nellie came tripping in, fresh, smiling, and happy. Even Mrs.

Everson's fastidious taste confessed the mountain girl peerless in her beauty.

Dressed in a simple morning-robe of white, her luxuriant raven hair caught up with a profusion of wild flowers, her dark eye beaming with a soft and tender light, and her cheek glowing with the rich hue of health, Nellie had never before appeared so lovely to that lady's eye. But the flush of health in the young girl's cheek deepened to a burning crimson, the happy smile changed to a look of wild amazement as she so suddenly found herself in the presence of Walter Everson's mother.

The first greeting over, in which condescending tenderness was met by cool though courteous astonishment, Mrs. Everson began:

"I see, my dear Miss Morrison, that you have not quite forgotten that unhappy affair at my house; but, really, you made that startling disclosure so abruptly, you can not be surprised that it quite overpowered us. Will you not forgive us all for our seeming rudeness?" and she held out her jeweled hand with a patronizing air.

"It was all forgiven long ago, if not forgotten," Nellie frankly replied; "but I should be a sad scholar indeed to lose thus soon the remembrance of a lesson so forcibly taught."

"I do not wonder at your sensitiveness, Miss Morrison; I like you better for it; it shows that you are a girl of spirit; but you must not infer more than was

really intended. We were startled and shocked, to be sure—my son especially—after the severe remarks he had been making; but when I tell you that he has lain upon a bed of sickness and suffering since then — that, in the delirium of fever, you were ever the theme of his mournings and wild ravings — that even now he languishes and pines for your presence, and has sent me to implore you to come to him — to come as his affianced bride and chase away the doubts and fears that haunt him — when I assure you that I am ready to receive you as my son's choice, you will not surely longer harbor unkind thoughts or hesitate to grant the reconciliation he so desires."

Esther Cram watched with agonizing earnestness the face of her child as Mrs. Everson spoke, and the beating of her heart had nearly ceased in the intensity with which she waited for the reply. It came in low, trembling tones as Nellie stood with downcast eyes.

"Both your son and yourself, madam, may rest assured that I cherish no unkind feelings towards you; gratitude for his former kindness would forbid that. But while I thank you for the honor you would confer upon me in consenting to receive one so much your inferior into your family, I must, in justice to myself, decline your proffered kindness."

"You do not realize what you are saying, Miss Morrison. I can not believe you would sacrifice both your own and another's happiness for so slight a cause. If my son is ready to forget your humble birth and raise

you to his own station in society, is not that sufficient proof of his attachment?"

"Your son can find many more worthy than I without looking beneath him."

"But he loves you, Nellie! loves you with all the strength and fervor of his nature."

Nellie sank upon a seat and buried her face in her hands, shaking all the while like an aspen leaf. The tide of recollection came surging over her, overwhelming her with its rush of thought and emotion. But the tempest quickly subsided, and a calm, perfect in its serenity, succeeded. With a dignity that gave force to her words, and an earnestness which showed that she spoke from the depths of her heart, she replied:

"It is useless, Mrs. Everson, to prolong this painful interview, recalling, as it does, such bitter memories of the past. Had your son held out to me a kindly hand when most I needed his support — had he proved himself possessed of those nobler traits with which my fancy had ever invested him, I should have been proud and happy in his love. But now that dream is past; and though I forgive the rude touch which awakened me, the spell is broken forever. I shall always be grateful to your son for first guiding me to the paths of knowledge, but believe me, no warmer sentiment will ever again dwell in my heart for him."

Ere the astonished woman could reply, Nellie had glided from her presence.

"Stay!" cried Esther Cram, waving her hand as Mrs. Everson arose, "I have yet a few words to say to you. You came hither to seek the low fortune-teller's child for your son's bride, did you?"

"I did it to save my son's life," was the haughty reply.

"And she has refused him, thank God!" the sick woman exclaimed, while her black eye shone with unnatural brilliancy. "But lest you should find comfort in the thought that your son has thereby escaped a *mesalliance*, let me tell you that that girl can boast higher blood than ever coursed through your veins. Did'st ever hear aught of General Morrison, the noble, brave commander *under whom your father served?* or his flattered and caressed daughter whom the world called beautiful and gifted, and whom Arthur Everson so madly loved ere you became his wife? Proud and haughty though the name you bear, *my father's child* yields precedence to none, and Esther Morrison might this day have stood where now you stand. But go now, lest in this hour of triumph my heart forgets its duty in exulting joy! Go! and remember that the mountain jewel is too precious for an Everson to guard!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

"THROUGH life's dark and thorny path,
Its goal the silent tomb,
It yet some spots of sunshine hath,
That shine amid the gloom.
The FRIEND, who weal and woe partakes,
Unchanged, whate'er his lot,
Who kindly soothes the heart that aches,
Is sure a sunny spot."

"WHAT'S the news, Mr. Murray? nothing very bad, I hope?" asked Dr. Jepson, as he entered his guest's room one morning, and found him sitting in thoughtful mood before some newly arrived letters.

"I can scarcely say that it is bad," the other replied with a peculiar smile; "and yet, just at this time, it troubles me; indeed, I am perplexed beyond measure."

"Can I do any thing for you, to help you out of your perplexity? Bessie and I both have become as much attached to you as though you really belonged to our family, and we'd be glad to do any thing we could for you, certain."

"You are kind, very kind, Doctor; be assured I warmly reciprocate that attachment. No where in this

country have I enjoyed the genial influences of home to such an extent as beneath your roof. I shall carry with me to England, for which I must soon depart, the remembrance of these happy days and weeks as one of the brightest spots in my life."

"You don't mean to say that you are really going to leave us soon, Mr. Murray! that would be bad news surely."

"The arrival of these letters will hasten my departure, Doctor; and it is that which troubles me this morning. I can not reconcile myself to the thought of leaving these pleasant scenes, endeared as they are by recollections of—of ——" Mr. Murray stopped in confusion.

"Do not fear to make a confident of me, Mr. Murray; I have already guessed your secret; and I honor you for it. She's a noble girl, worthy of any man's love."

"Thank you, thank you, Doctor; I know that I can rely upon your confidence and friendship, and I will do so. I am not ashamed to acknowledge that I love Miss Morrison—that I have, from the first moment I beheld her, been irresistibly drawn towards her. But I dare not hope ever to awaken any other than a friendly interest in her heart, after the deep and passionate love she has borne another."

"She is pretty thoroughly cured of that, I reckon," said the Doctor, smiling; "at any rate, her cool reception of Walter Everson's mother, after she had come

all the way up here to ask Nellie to marry her son, didn't look much like being in love with him, did it?"

"Pride may have prevented her from accepting such an offer."

"Nellie's proud enough, that's certain; but she's the soul of truth, and she told Mrs. Everson that she did not, and never should, entertain any other feelings than those of gratitude towards her son. Her mother, who has studied her so thoroughly that she can almost read her thoughts, says she has not a doubt that Nellie spoke truly. And a wonderful relief it was to *her*, too."

"Yet Nellie did love him with an almost idolatrous affection."

"You're right there Mr. Murray; it was the blind worship of an idolater; but when her eyes were opened, and she saw nothing but a cold marble statue her imagination had clothed with unearthly glory, the infatuation vanished, and Nellie was her own noble self again."

"I shall never forget the moment of that discovery, Doctor, while I live; there was a moral grandeur and sublimity about the beautiful girl in that fearful crisis, which exalted her heaven-high above those who scorned her, and made her seem like some angelic being in earth's guise."

"I can imagine just how Nellie looked. Gim-i-*ni!* I shouldn't like to have been in Walter Everson's place just then!"

"Pardon me for disagreeing with you, but I should. One approving smile or a word of sympathy, one warm,

loving grasp of the hand, and her heart had been forever his. Oh! how could he so ruthlessly crush a jewel more rich and rare than ever graced a royal throne!"

"I don't doubt 'twas all for the best, Mr. Murray; young Everson never was worthy of her, and it was better she should know it before it was too late. Nellie will make some body a splendid wife yet, who knows but it may be yourself?"

"Dr. Jepson, earth could bring me no higher joy, could yield no richer treasure, than her love; but 'tis a prize beyond my reach, I fear."

"'Faint heart never won fair lady,' you know," the Doctor cheerfully replied; "come, come, my good friend, you'll never know what you can do till you try. I'm sure Nellie seems to be very fond of you, and you've quite won her mother's heart by your kindness during her sickness."

"I confess, Doctor, there have been moments when hope has whispered to my heart, that by long, patient, untiring devotion, I might at last win a prize so coveted; but now, even that faint hope deserts me, for duty imperatively demands my presence at home, and I must soon leave her. God alone knows how deeply I suffer in view of such a separation."

"But why do you go so soon? Why not wait awhile till you have learned how Nellie regards you? surely you would not mind a sacrifice in your business for such a purpose!"

"Talk of sacrifice, Dr. Jepson! I would give every

thing I possess on earth for the *assurance* of her love."

"Not quite, my young friend, for a man can not live upon love—nor a woman either, though it is a very delicious and essential condiment, I grant. But seriously, Mr. Murray, must you go so very soon?"

"I am obliged to; but I go most reluctantly, I assure you. These letters bring me important information which requires my immediate attention and presence at home. Notwithstanding, if I thought that a few weeks' delay would ——"

"Increase your chances? of course it would," Dr. Jepson hastily interrupted, as Mr. Murray paused; "I don't know how urgent your business at home may be, but I should advise you to stay, at any rate, a little longer if possible."

"Your advice accords so well with my own inclination, Doctor, that I am almost tempted to follow it at all hazards. I will tell you the urgency of my business, for your kindness to me demands that you should know something more than you now do, of my history, friends, etc."

"I know you for a good, true, honest young man—one who cares not whether the hand that grasps your own carries gold in its palm; or whether the world nods approvingly before you dare claim a friend. I know enough of you, Mr. Murray, to be willing to place in your keeping the happiness of one dear to me as an own child. What more do I need to know?"

"From my very heart I thank you for your confidence, Doctor, and in grateful return, I beg you will read this letter, just received, which will convey to you better perhaps than I can, who and what you have so fully trusted."

So saying, Mr. Murray took from the table before him an imposing looking document, and passing it to the Doctor he added:

"No honor there conferred upon me affords such genuine satisfaction as your words have done. To you, therefore, I am happy to confide a secret long carefully guarded by me."

"Gim-i-*ni!*" exclaimed the astonished Doctor, after he had intently scanned every word and line; "God and man seem to have agreed for once, certain. Give me your hand, my noble fellow; you're worthy of an earldom—yes, or a kingdom either. And so you would make our mountain flower, our Nellie a ——"

"Hush, Doctor! breathe it not even to the walls. I would win her, if at all, for myself alone. Not that I think she would marry for wealth or station—she is far too pure and high-minded for that. But the joy of knowing that she would be mine, even were I poor and humble, is the bliss my heart craves."

"And you will have it, I know you will! Nellie can't help loving you. Gim-i-*ni!* how my head whirls! Do let me go and tell Bessie—I shall die if I don't."

"Stop a moment, Doctor," Mr. Murray replied, smiling at the good man's excitement; "you must promise

first that neither of you will, by word or look, betray my secret. I am strenuous about it."

"You needn't be afraid of me; I'd sooner cut my tongue out—and as for Bessie, you can always trust her. Gim-i-*ni!* won't she stare though?" and the Doctor rushed out, calling loudly as his portly frame shook the stairs with his rapid descent: "Bessie, Bessie come here quick, quick, I tell you—no matter what you're doing!"

Mr. Murray smilingly folded his letters and laid them carefully away, then, scarce heeding where his steps led on, he sauntered forth, to ponder yet more deeply the all-absorbing subject of his morning's meditations. Hopes and fears alternately agitated his breast, as, more by intuition than design, he followed the little well-beaten path up the mountain.

Was it the spirit of love that turned his steps aside, just where, in his life's highway, the finger-post pointed to "destiny," and where, as he unwittingly wandered on, he suddenly found himself face to face with the fair object of his thoughts? We know not what spiritual affinities may have drawn him thither, but we do know that he read that in Nellie's smile of welcome, which caused the blood to leap wildly in his veins, and his heart to throb with new hope.

"Miss Morrison—Nellie!" he exclaimed, forgetting all caution and reserve, as he threw his arm around her; "let me, for once, speak the burning words which consume my heart; let me tell you how passionately, how madly I love you—how, like some sacred being I have

worshiped you afar off, these many years, when your smile was not for me. O Nellie! could you but know how I longed to fold you to my heart, when you were so cruelly forsaken, and breathe into your soul the living breath of a love like mine; could you but know how I have yearned day by day to heal your wounded spirit, to chase the sadness from your brow; could you but read my thoughts and see how, true as the needle to the pole, they turn ever to you as the bright star of my existence, you would realize something, perhaps, of the great love I bear you. Give me, oh! give me but one word of hope—say, even, that you do not spurn the suit I so earnestly bring; tell me that I may yet perchance win a place in your heart, Nellie, and I will forever bless you."

Rapidly, incoherently almost as he had spoken, every syllable fell distinctly upon Nellie's quickened ear; she felt the sincerity and truth of his fervent pleadings, and with a thrill of joy scarcely less than his own, she replied:

"You are too noble and good, Mr. Murray, to be trifled with for a moment—ever since the vail was withdrawn which so deceived my youthful fancy, I have seen and felt your worth—my mother too—oh! what do we not owe to your kindness ——"

"Is that all, Nellie?" he sadly asked as she hesitated; "does your heart respond to no warmer sentiment? is gratitude *all* that I may ever hope to claim?"

"Forgive me—no ——" and the crimson blush burned

over cheek and brow as she laid her hand in his, and found herself at once imprisoned in his arms.

"God bless you, Nellie, my own Nellie," he fondly murmured, pressing his lips to her forehead; "ever shall it be my blissful lot to guard this precious gift—life will, indeed, be sweet to me now, with thee ever at my side, my beautiful, my long-loved one."

And so they were betrothed—beneath the shade of the great forest oak, whose waving branches seemed to nod approvingly above their heads—while, in jubilant songs, the wild birds caroled forth their sweetest notes, as if to bear to heaven the joyful news.

What more fitting temple in which to consecrate their new-born hopes and joys! There, amidst the scenes of her infancy and childhood; there, where first to her opening mind came visions strange and wild, of the world away in the dim, distant horizon; there, where first the mystery of life began to unvail before her, the mountain girl plighted her simple faith to her noble lover. Alone, upon the green sward, with the broad blue canopy of heaven above them, and myriads of nature's voices filling the air with their peans of praise, they knelt for heaven's blessing upon their troth Who can doubt that as the bright swift-winged messengers bore aloft those pure vows, their holy incense reached the Throne, shedding a brighter glow upon the recording pen!

"Take her, Mr. Murray—she has been my all on

earth—the comfort and joy of my heart—the ministering angel of my declining years. Take her, for well do you deserve the priceless gift I now so gladly intrust to your keeping—take her, with a mother's warmest prayers for your happiness, and may the blessing of Him, who hath tenderly led me through life's dark mysterious ways to the verge of a new and glorious existence, rest upon you, my children."

As Esther Cram ceased speaking, a bright ray of sunlight fell across the bowed heads upon which her wasted hands were laid, as though Heaven would set its own effulgent seal to the solemn compact.

CHAPTER XXV.

"Let me take my slumber, then,
Far from haunts of busy men,
In a spot as fair as this,
Where the playful breezes kiss
Early blossoms, fragrant flowers.
Let me in such quiet bowers
Find at last my resting-place.
Flesh to grave, and soul to grace!
'Mid such peaceful Sabbath reigning,
'Mid such melancholy plaining
Of sweet birds above my head,
Would I tarry when I'm dead."

At last the summons came. Borne by the soft breath of the evening zephyr to the waiting, longing soul came the spirit's call. Unheard by mortal ear, the voiceless message fell in clear, distinct tones upon the dying woman's heart: "Thy Master calls thee home." No terror shook her frame, no fear dimmed her eye; but with a calm and trustful smile, she grasped the hand stretched forth to lead her through the dark valley. Death and the grave! where their victory and sting? Swallowed up, forgotten, in the dazzling radiance which gleamed from a Father's throne across the turbid waters of the fearful stream.

A few last sunset rays lingered around the little mountain home, shedding their crimson hue upon the pallid face where death had set his seal, as if to plume the immortal spirit for its flight.

"See you this heavenly token," murmured the dying woman, casting a loving glance upon the tearful group around her bed; "thus shall my soul forever bask in immortal light and glory. Soon shall the portals of my shining home open to receive the weary, returning prodigal; soon shall I hear my Father's voice welcoming me to the joy of my Lord! Oh! what are the few, fleeting years of our life—its petty cares and sorrows, its best and highest joys—compared with the bliss of an eternity? Nellie, my darling one, my sole earthly blessing, ever remember this hour; should grief and sorrow rend your heart—should the world's cold breath seem to congeal your very soul, as it often has mine, think of your mother's last words—your mother, who has drank deeply the bitter dregs of sorrow, whose life's sun arose in brightness, yet became blackened by dark despair, till the cloud was pierced by celestial light, and which now sinks forever to its rest, amidst the effulgent glories of a new, eternal dawn."

"Bless me, mother, oh! bless me, ere you go," sobbed the grief-stricken girl, throwing herself upon her knees by the bedside of the dying one, who had sunk back exhausted upon her pillow.

With a smile of unutterable love, Esther Cram slowly moved her nerveless hand, damp with the cold dews of

death, and laying it upon those raven tresses, she softly murmured: "To thee, O Father, in whose presence I shall shortly stand, to the infinite love and holy care of those ministering spirits whom thou dost send to guard and protect from evil thy chosen ones, do I commend my orphan child. Lead her gently on through this vale of tears, ever shielding her from temptation and sin, and at last gather her with the ransomed ones around thy throne.

"Blessings rest upon thee, my child! such blessings as heaven alone can give. May the God of the fatherless be thy portion and trust; may thy young heart ne'er be blighted by grief or woe; may life be to thee bright and joyful, and death a triumphant entrance to eternal bliss! With my last breath will I bless thee, Nellie, my precious one; and with thee, him also whom thou lovest. Come hither, my son, that I may look upon thy face once more ere I sleep forever. 'Tis a sacred trust I leave with thee; guard it well, and when at last the Lord shall make up his jewels, let thine be found undimmed within the holy casket. Take now her hand in thine, and here, in the solemn presence of death, promise anew to cherish her through life with love and tenderness. Let her soul's welfare be your chiefest care, and whatever your lot, share it in peace and love, never forgetting the glorious inheritance for which you live."

Ere the slowly uttered, half-whispered words had ceased, Augustus Murray knelt beside Nellie, and clasp-

ing her hand in his, he reverently bowed his head, while the fast-falling tears coursed down his manly cheek. In a voice broken with his deep emotion, he replied: "This precious bequest I receive from your dying hand, mother, shall be more treasured, more tenderly prized, than my own life. Sacredly will I watch over your trust, and as I deal by her so may God deal with me, both here and hereafter."

A deathly hue overspread the sufferer's face, and for a moment the spirit seemed to have taken its flight, but the responsive "Amen" which trembled on her livid lips, in seal of that solemn pledge, showed that her quickened ear had caught his words.

Thus, as the lengthening shadows of evening crept around the hut, and the last song of day had been hushed to rest, the fluttering spirit still hovered in its mortal abode. The stillness of night hung o'er the mountain — darkness gathered around, hiding all its beauty; but no night was there in her soul—no darkness dimmed the radiant glory of the throne on which her gaze was fixed. Almost home! within sight of her promised rest! What wonder that the beatific vision shut out all earthly thoughts?

The weeping ones around her watched with shuddering fear and silent awe the cold shadow of death enshroud her loved form; they saw its mysterious vail draw slowly over her dark eye till its light was hidden in the misty gray; they almost felt the icy touch which marbled her brow and stopped the life-blood in its

course; but her rapt soul, filled with its divine contemplation, scarce heeded the moment when its pinions were loosed.

And thus, in the solemn midnight hour, she passed away! The sighing, moaning winds through the forest-trees, with their wailing, dirge-like notes, chanted forth her requiem; the stars looked down in their quiet beauty upon her cold and lifeless form, as she lay in that calm, sweet sleep. The happy, holy smile with which she entered Paradise still rested on her pale features, as if the ransomed spirit would cast its bright halo back to earth.

"My mother, O my mother!" cried Nellie, throwing herself with wild and passionate grief upon the still bosom of the dead. Alas! how cold and drear come back to the bereaved heart those first unanswered words of love, when the voice whose tones are blended with our earliest memories is silent forever, and the lips where ever dwelt the loving response are mute and motionless to all our wildest appeals. O death! no keener, sharper sorrow canst thou bring than when thou layest the mother low!

Gently drawing her from that cold embrace, Mr. Murray's voice broke upon the stillness, in low, clear tones: "'Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord: yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them.' Look up, Nellie, my stricken one; see the heavenly smile with which your sainted mother even now seeks to comfort

and strengthen your heart! how sweetly she rests from her labors! how joyfully she has gone to her reward! Let us not, then, grieve over her happy release, but, strong in that faith which can thus triumph over death, let us strive for the same glorious hope of immortality. Nellie, dearest, lay your sorrowing head upon my breast; henceforth it is your only home—and oh! may I never prove unworthy of that mother's dying trust!"

At the close of day, the hour she loved so well, they laid the fortune-teller to rest in a little green glade, where the wild flowers bloomed in luxuriant beauty, and the bubbling spring murmured ever its low, sweet song, as it sent forth its tiny, vivifying streams. 'Twas a strange and almost weird-like scene, that first burial upon the mountain, when the little funeral train, mingling with the lengthened shadows twilight threw across their rugged path, wound slowly up to the consecrated spot—the rude bier, with its sable pall, borne by rough but loving hands—the sad, solemn faces of kind-hearted neighbors, paying their last tribute to one who had been both feared and loved, and the bowed form of the stricken orphan, whose convulsive sobs echoed mournfully through the still night air, supported with almost reverent fondness by her noble lover. How heartless and formal seem the pomp and pageantry with which the favored sons of fortune are ofttimes consigned to their narrow tomb, compared with simple obsequies ike these! A fervent, heartfelt prayer, wafted upwards

by the free winds of heaven; a few brief words of deepest sympathy, uttered in no cold, constrained tone, but springing with fervid warmth from heart to lip; a last tender farewell to the precious dust committed to its native element, and then, in silence and sadness, they turn away, leaving the quiet sleeper to her long repose. Sweet indeed and undisturbed will be her rest in that lonely mountain grave; summer suns will clothe the little mound with verdant, blooming beauty—winter's fierce winds will howl and shriek above her lowly bed, but no sound save the last great trump shall awake her to life again! Blessed her sleep! thrice blessed her awakening! for the joyful sound shall herald her to eternal joys!

CHAPTER XXVI.

"HARD task to cure, with human skill,
Disease of heart and mental ill;
Thought will corrode in spite of reason,
When man to truth and worth plays treason."

MRS. EVERSON returned from her long and wearisome journey in no enviable state of mind; at one moment deeply chagrined that her humiliating suit should have met with such a repulse—the next, revolving Esther Cram's strange disclosure with an intuitive conviction of its truth, for well and bitterly she remembered her husband's devotion to his first and early love, with all the heartburnings and jealous strifes it had caused—and again dwelling with involuntary admiration upon the beautiful girl who had so proudly though respectfully rejected the proffered honor, and picturing to herself the life and joy such a being would bring, even to her stately home. But, as she neared that home, the vision of a pale, wasted face, watching and waiting with feverish longing for her coming—listening too with tensed nerve for a step lighter than her own, a form

dearer even than a mother's—shut out all other thought and feeling save the fearful one that hers must now be the task of crushing out forever the light of hope from a heart which had once beat beneath her own. At times a vague feeling of responsibility would force itself upon her mind—a feeling that she was now beginning to reap the fruits of her own example and teachings—but it was instantly repelled with indignant scorn, as but the vile whisperings of the adversary. She had instilled into the minds of her children nothing more than a proper respect for themselves and their station—only a due regard to custom and the claims of good society. Surely, then, she need not reproach herself, even though the blight had fallen upon her house and struck down its sole support and light. So reasoned the worldly woman, but ever and anon there would steal up from the *mother's* heart a still small voice, which told how the warm, gushing streams of childhood's affectionate nature had been chilled and dried away in the narrow, shallow channel whither she had forced them—how, under her guidance, the noble instincts of her naturally large-hearted boy had been cramped and dwarfed to the world's estimate of a man—an estimate which, if she would but let nature speak, she in her inmost soul despised.

Ah! not alone stands she among the mothers of the land, as she views too late the wreck to which her false chart has led the young voyager, who first launched his little boat on life's troubled waters with her at helm

and bow. Woman's mission! what is it but to shed her subtle influence through every nerve and fiber of this great world's being?—quickening its pulsations for good, and gently raising its aspirations higher and higher, till at last the summit of earthly greatness is attained and millennial joys crown her work. If such her high and holy trust, (and who that has a heart can doubt?) how fearful *her* guilt who wantonly perverts that mightiest power e'er committed to mortal keeping —*a mother's influence!*—a gift which angels well might covet, in their tender, watchful care o'er earth—an influence more potent for good or evil than monarch ever wielded or royalty could boast.

It was the hour of twilight; the noisy din of city life had gradually died away, till only a confused murmur reached the ear; yet the approaching stillness seemed rather to increase than lessen the nervous restlessness with which Walter Everson moved about from room to room, stopping ever and anon to gaze from the deep bow-window up and down the broad street, in earnest expectancy. Occasionally his glance would rest upon a picture which hung conspicuously on the wall, and then his pale face would light up with an almost rapturous expression, succeeded quickly by one of doubt and fear and mute despair.

Memory busied herself with the past, as he thus watched and waited—sometimes clothing it in rainbow hues of promise, and sometimes withdrawing the vail with which he had sought to conceal his base conduct,

revealing a deformity which caused him to shudder, while he acknowledged its truth. Thus hoping yet fearing, longing for yet almost dreading his mother's return, had Walter passed the long days and weeks of her absence. Health and strength came slowly back to his shattered frame, and with them higher and loftier purposes of life. Ah! could he but have sooner felt the stirrings of those nobler thoughts and impulses! could he have earlier learned to discern *the right*—but we will not anticipate.

Scarcely had he betaken himself to his room, whither he had gone to await in silent expectation the coming of another day of hopes and fears, when the door suddenly opened and his mother stood before him, pale and worn with fatigue, while the haggard lines about her mouth betrayed the deeper suffering beneath. With a stifled cry he sprang towards her.

"God help you, my son!" was all she could utter, as she threw herself upon his neck and wept. But it was enough; all the bright visions of future joy and the happiness in which he had reveled were blotted out forever by those hopeless words. Stunned, bewildered by the sudden shock, he stood with scarce the power to speak or move, till terror for his safety caused his mother's tears to cease, and called up every art to break the fearful spell. For a few moments reason seemed to totter on its throne, but at length nature triumphed, and with a wail of anguish, which showed how deep the poisoned shaft had sunk, he threw him-

self upon a couch and yielded to the wild, passionate burst of grief, which convulsed his whole frame.

"Walter, Walter, my son," cried his mother, bending tenderly over him, in accents of deepest concern, "do not suffer yourself to be thus overcome; is life of no value to you now, because a stranger chooses not to share your home? Will you forget her who gave you birth, and whose sole support and comfort you are, for an obscure girl, not worthy your love? Rouse up, my son, I do beseech you; think rationally of this thing, and let your manhood assert itself as becomes your father's child."

"Leave me alone, a little while, mother," he brokenly uttered, when she ceased; "I shall be calmer soon, I hope. Return in an hour," he added, as, in obedience to his suggestion, she left the room.

The suffering, the conflict of that hour, none may know save He who seeth in secret; but when Mrs. Everson returned, there was a humble, subdued light in his eye, which told that the fearful struggle had ended in quiet, calm submission.

"Tell me all now," he said, burying his face in the cushion, lest it might betray some sudden emotion; "conceal nothing from me; I would know the worst."

It was not strange that a tinge of bitterness should shade Mrs. Everson's recital of her unsuccessful mission, for, unconsciously perhaps to herself, she had imbibed a deep aversion towards the innocent cause of her son's suffering.

"You wrong Nellie, mother," said Walter, when she had finished; "she is not heartless or cold; her delicate, sensitive nature could not bear the rude shock my stupid folly caused. Blame her not, mother, for that would make my punishment more terrible still. I alone am in fault, and it is just that I should suffer for it."

"For my part I can not see what unpardonable sin you committed, in showing a natural horror at the sudden discovery of gross deception, on the part of one from whom you had a right to expect the fullest confidence. 'Twas she who deserved the punishment, not you, the victim of her wiles," Mrs. Everson replied with feeling.

"Oh! do not add cruelty to injustice, mother," Walter warmly rejoined; "Nellie never willfully deceived me; she was the mirror of truth and frankness."

"Never deceived you, Walter! never deceived us all, by passing herself off for what she was not! How strangely infatuated you must be, my son, not to see it in its true light."

"And how strangely forgetful you are, mother, not to remember the explanation Mrs. Waters gave, which seemed so satisfactory at the time," Walter mildly added.

"Mrs. Waters did, to be sure, take all the blame to herself in that matter," said Mrs. Everson, "but I could never fully exonerate Miss Morrison."

"That is because you do not know her, mother, as well as I do; just think what moral courage it must

have required to brave, as she did, the ridicule and sarcasm of those who had caressed and petted her, rather than hear her mother's name insulted. O Nellie, Nellie! noble, incomparable girl! what madness possessed me to turn so coldly from thee, at the moment when most I should have gloried in thee! 'Tis right, 'tis just that thou should'st spurn me now!" The tone of hopeless despondency in which Walter spoke touched his mother's heart.

"You reproach yourself unjustly, my son," she replied in a softer voice; "had you been even as culpable as you say, you have certainly made every reparation in your power since."

"Too late! too late! love once lost can never be regained," said Walter, shaking his head mournfully; "she whose pure affection might have brightened all my days has learned to despise me; repentance came, alas! too late. O mother! do you now not see what a curse *pride* brings upon itself? how it embitters all the sweet springs of life? how it blasts and withers every good and noble purpose of the soul? Bitterly, too bitterly, have I learned the fatal lesson ever to forget." He covered his face and groaned aloud, while scarcely less agitated Mrs. Everson caught his hand, exclaiming:

"And it was I, my son, who taught it to you! I who have brought all this misery upon you! Yes, Walter, to you whom I have so misguided, so wronged, will I freely confess; I do at last see my sin and error, and on her bended knee your mother begs you to forgive her."

The proud woman would have knelt in her contrition, had not Walter gently restrained her.

"Mother, is it indeed so?" he cried, with streaming eye; "are your eyes open too? Ask me not to forgive you, for oh! in my soul I bless you for those words; together we will seek forgiveness where alone it can be found."

If louder tune the angelic harps—if sweeter, more joyful strains their tongues employ, when one repentant sinner turns, how must have swelled their song of praise as from those hearts, where pride had reigned supreme, arose the humble incense of penitence and prayer!

Could Nellie, in her mountain home, when first to her chaotic mind a world of wonder rose to view, have looked with prescient eye upon a scene like this, and traced its cause back to her simple, untaught self, how would life have wrapped its mysterious folds more closely around her, till wonder ceased in awe and fear.

Glorious indeed her mission, like that of countless others—to break down the barriers of pride, the strongholds of rank and wealth, by a quiet, unobtrusive life of truth. Well has she begun that life—nobly will she perform her mission; for to the free, undaunted spirit, who fearlessly pursues *the right*, it is not permitted to faint or fall by the way.

CHAPTER XXVII.

"THEN come the wild weather, come sleet or come snow,
We will stand by each other, however it blow;
Oppression, and sickness, and sorrow, and pain
Shall be to our true love as links to the chain."

ALONE, upon her old accustomed seat on the rock, Nellie sat one autumn morning ere the dawn of day had scarce peeped among the hills or gilded the mountain-tops. From her sleepless pillow beneath the good Doctor's roof she had stolen softly forth to her favorite retreat, where she might breathe to the winds of heaven the crowding thoughts and emotions which had filled her wakeful hours. Every eventful scene in her life seemed to rise before her with minute distinctness as her eye roved around upon the rich and glowing landscape so familiar to her childhood and youth.

It was nothing new for to sit thus and gaze abroad upon the waking world; from her earliest years she had been wont to hail the first rising beams and to watch the varying tints as, from out the misty gray of morn, they grew to the bright effulgence of day. No rock or tree, no hill or valley in all that vast amphi-

theater of beauty but had been compassed by her practiced eye; from the dim distant horizon to the very spot on which she rested, every object had been scanned with the closest scrutiny till each seemed necessary to the harmonious blending of the whole.

But on *that* morning, her gaze wandered with new and peculiar interest over the familiar scene. Inexpressibly sweet and tender were the emotions her speaking face betrayed as her glance dwelt lingeringly upon each loved object around her wild mountain home. Dear to her were these mute friends of her early years — these silent witnesses of the long struggle with the woes of life, which had at last laid *her mother* low beneath the sod; sweet to her the remembrance of the many hours she had rambled through this vast temple of nature; sweet, even though with that remembrance came thoughts of one whom her child-heart had venerated and worshiped as some being of superior mold, but of whose *true* worth her riper judgment had formed a far different estimate.

Oh! how poignantly comes home to the heart that has loved, the sickening, saddening conviction of the beloved one's *unworthiness!* how it overthrows and desolates that earthly paradise in which we had so blissfully lived! how, with almost lightning power, it blasts the noble tree beneath whose shade we have so deliciously reposed, and sends us forth, stunned and bewildered by the stroke, to find no more that perfect

rest—that unwavering trust in earthly love! Thus had it been with Nellie; at one fell blow her idol was shattered, and beneath its ruins lay buried her first unfaltering faith in man. But with a Promethean touch had those ashes been again enkindled into life, till o'er the grave of shattered hopes had arisen a holier, purer love—a love which paid its first allegiance to Heaven, and from *thence* drew its confidence and trust. The wild, passionate admiration Nellie had lavished upon Walter Everson ere she discovered his true character, was like the tempestuous tossing and rolling waves of the billowy ocean, while deep and calm as that ocean's channel, yet drawing all the forces of her being into its quiet power, was the love with which she had plighted her hand to Augustus Murray.

'Twas of all these things that Nellie mused as she sat in the gray light of that Autumn morn, watching, for the last time, the sun rise upon the dear old mountain. She could think of Walter Everson now with only a feeling of pity for his weakness—a sense of regret, *for his own sake*, at his unworthiness. But not of him were the thoughts that crowded most upon her in that hour of retrospection. The mother, sleeping so peacefully beneath that green mound, her cares and sorrows forever hushed to rest; the friends through whose kindness she had been raised from degradation and want, to happiness and honor, and from whom she was about to part; and, above all, the chosen one who was henceforth to be her guide, her counselor, her all

of earthly hope and joy — these claimed the precious fleeting moments.

Slowly the coming day unvailed its glories before her, its golden touch awakening bird, tree, and flower. Softly its dawning light fell around her fair form, while her lingering gaze sent forth its mute farewell to each cherished object.

A sweet and holy smile lighted up her face as the sun broke forth in splendor and the voices of the forest rang out their mingled melody.

"The dear old mountain is putting on its sunniest face for me this morning," she softly murmured, while a faint blush stole over her cheek. "Would that its brightness was but the presage of coming days."

"Amen!" responded a low voice near her, which caused the blush to mantle still deeper as she sprang up quickly from her seat. "Pardon me, Nellie," said Mr. Murray, leaping lightly up to her side; "I have not been playing eaves-dropper, I assure you. I came up only in time to hear that last fervent wish of yours, and I could not restrain the response which sprang to my lips. But has my Nellie any fears about the future?"

"Yes, many, Augustus," Nellie frankly replied; "but they arise from a consciousness of my own imperfections, not from any distrust of you."

"Then they will vanish like these morning mists, and your life be as cloudless as this our bridal day. God grant it may be even so, my beautiful one," said

he, raising her hand reverently to his lips; "but tell me once more, Nellie, have you no misgivings in thus placing your whole happiness in my keeping? in leaving home, friends, and all these dear familiar scenes for a strange home in a far-off land with one who may, perchance, be not all he seems?"

Nellie turned towards her lover, as he ceased, with a sweet expression of calm and holy trust upon her face, and placing both hands in his, replied:

"Where thou goest, I will go, and where thou abidest, there will I also abide; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God."

"And may God do so to me, and more also, if I cherish thee not even as my own life, my peerless bride!" exclaimed Mr. Murray, raising his eyes, suffused with manly tears, to heaven. "Nellie, on this rock, where first I saw and loved you — among these scenes so endeared to us both, and especially over that grave where sleeps *our* beloved mother, would I again renew those vows of love and constancy which we are this day to plight at the altar; and O my loved one! may heaven grant me the joy of shielding thee from blight and sorrow — of sharing with thee a life of blissful love."

"Be mine, too, the lot to cheer and comfort you, my noble Augustus," Nellie warmly responded, "to meet privation, sorrow, want, if need be, with a loving, trusting heart. Oh! how strange it seems to me to-day to look back upon the little wild outcast child that I was,

repulsed and scorned by every body, and compare it with my present overflowing happiness! Surely my cup runneth over."

"Listen, Nellie!" cried Murray, springing up and drawing her to his side as the merry sound of the village bell echoed through the mountain, "those joyful tones are heralding our happiness. Come, let us hasten, or they will think my bride lingers regretfully over the past."

"My mother's grave! Come with me," Nellie replied in a low voice, descending from the rock and leading the way along a little winding path to the green mound, over which a simple marble slab had been raised in memory of the deed.

Into that sacred retreat in such an hour of holy communion it were sacrilege to intrude. Let the silent farewell between the living and the dead be vailed from mortal eye. Turn we to a far different scene beneath the good Doctor's roof.

"Gim-i-*ni!* Betsy," said he, throwing down his knife and fork as he sat at breakfast that morning, "I believe I've got an affection of the heart, certain. There's a terrible pain all around that region."

"It doesn't require much medical skill to account for that pain," his wife replied, smiling rather sadly; "'tis hard to give her up, dear child!"

"That's what it is, wife, even though she is to become ——"

"Hush! husband! here comes John. Don't let him suspect any thing."

"I'll be blowed if I can do a plaguey chore this mornin'," said John, coming in and sitting down with a dogged, determined air; "the very deuce has got inter all the critters, and me, too, I believe."

"Another case of heart-disease, I guess," Mrs. Jepson roguishly remarked to her husband.

"It's a contagion that'll spread to-day, certain," said he, "for every body in the whole village loves Nellie."

"That's a fact," chimed in John; "I wish you'd jest see how slick they've fixed up the old meetin-'us for her to git married in. You wouldn't b'leve but what you'd got inter the woods, sure as rates. Sich a tuggin' and scrambling as they've bin a-havin' afore they got it all right, and sich thunderin' lots o' flowers as they're gon' to throw inter the big aisle for her to walk on!"

"You say 'they,' but I guess, if the truth is known, you did your share of it all, didn't you, John?"

"Wal, I can't say but what I give 'em a lift now and then; but you see Molly and I kind o' wanted to do somethin' all by ourselves, and so I jest brung this 'ere over to see if 'twould do for our Nellie."

John stepped out a moment and returned with a bouquet of choice flowers exquisitely arranged.

"Why, John, where did you get this?" exclaimed

Mrs. Jepson, surprised at the taste manifested in the gift.

"'Twas Molly and I raised and tended 'em all a-purpose for her. Bless her soul! we feel jest as if we's goin' to bury our best friend to-day," and unable to control himself any longer, John rushed out of the room brushing his eyes with the sleeve of his coat.

"There will be many tears mingled with the rejoicings over our Nellie's happiness," said Mrs. Jepson; "she is such a favorite every where. Mr. Murray, too, has won a high place in the estimation of the neighbors. What will they say when they find they have been entertaining one of the real nobility so familiarly?"

"What'll Nellie say when she finds herself the wife of a nobleman instead of the poor artist she believes him to be? Gim-i-*ni!* how she will stare when she gets to Philadelphia and sees all the rich things he has ordered from England for her! 'Twill be equal to the 'Arabian Nights' stories, won't it?"

"There will be a great sensation, no doubt, especially at Lydia's 'reception,' when those who witnessed Nellie's noble confession of her birth will also witness her hour of triumph. Poor child, she well deserves her brilliant reward. But I must go and finish packing for our journey. Hark! what's that bell ringing so for?"

"It's for our Nellie, certain," cried the Doctor, catching up his hat and going towards the door; "they

mean to make a merry wedding of it if they do feel bad, I reckon."

For some moments after her husband had gone out, Mrs. Jepson stood leaning her head thoughtfully upon the casement; then, with a deep sigh and an expression in which joy and sorrow both commingled, she turned to hasten her preparations for the important events of the day. . . .

"Your blessing, my beloved benefactors, my earthly saviours, my more than parents!" exclaimed Nellie in low and earnest tones as, a few hours later, she knelt before these tried friends of her youth in a simple robe of white, with the bridal vail flowing from her dark hair; "let your benediction rest upon my head ere I go forth to the solemn vows which await me."

"No greater blessing can I crave for you, my dear child," said Mrs. Jepson, tenderly embracing her, "than that the God of peace and love may ever reign in your heart and home; that whatever your lot, your heart may be kept in Christian simplicity and humility. No mother's love was ever deeper than mine for you, Nellie, and never could a mother's heart breathe more fervent prayers for her child's happiness than does mine to-day. God bless you, my beloved one, in joy or sorrow, in prosperity or adversity. God keep you in his own right hand."

"Amen and amen!" cried the Doctor, laying his

hand upon the young girl's head. "You've been a blessing and a comfort to us, Nellie — that's what you have, and the Lord will repay you for it."

"Here, my child, take this," he added as she arose; "it is my wedding gift, and I only wish it was greater."

Nellie took the parcel he offered her, and, unrolling it, exclaimed earnestly:

"No, no, Uncle Jepson; indeed I can not suffer you to do this. I am already loaded with your favors. Pray keep your generous gift, and accept my thanks for the spirit which prompted it."

"Stop a moment, Nellie, before you refuse it," said he; "'tis Walter Everson's gift, after all, not mine."

"Walter Everson's!" was her astonished exclamation.

"Yes. Don't you remember I told you he left three hundred dollars with me, when you was a little gal, to educate you with? Well, you don't suppose I'd use any man's money for that while I'd got a cent of my own, do you? I made up my mind I'd keep it for you till some such time as this. So here's the three hundred with every cent of interest since that time."

"Dear, dear Uncle Jepson, you can not know what a load you have removed from me! Now I can free myself from that hated obligation. Yes, I will accept it gladly, gratefully, and return it to Mr. Everson, and thus drive away the last cloud which rested upon my heart."

Nellie's face glowed with animation as she spoke,

and both of her hearers felt that a secret trouble, of whose existence they were not before cognizant, had been removed.

"Gim-i-*ni!* I believe you're right, Nellie, though I didn't think of your sending it back to him. You're a girl of spirit, certain."

"The folks down-stairs is a-waitin' for ye," said Molly, putting her head in at the door.

"Come, wife, cheer up. Let's have no long faces or wet eyes to-day. Nellie's happy enough, and so I mean to be. Ah! here comes Mr. Murray to lead away his bride. Take her, sir, and with her ten thousand blessings."

The good Doctor's voice trembled as he placed the hand of the maiden in that of her lover's.

"'Tis a rare gift," said Mr. Murray, tenderly drawing her arm within his, "and one which it shall be my life-care to guard and protect."

"Stop one moment, Nellie," he added, gently detaining her as the others passed down-stairs, "let me place this upon your finger. 'Tis the bright seal of our union."

"Ah! Augustus!" she exclaimed, holding up her hand, on which flashed a magnificent diamond ring, "I fear your love for me has led you to forget that such gems are not for the wife of a poor artist."

"Mine deserves a coronet of them," he replied with a proud and happy smile as they joined the guests below.

The village church again sent forth its joyous peals, while within its walls, adorned with rustic beauty, an eager throng of loving faces watched and waited the coming of the beautiful mountain girl, that day a bride. It was a scene of simple grandeur, outvieing cathedral pomp and show when the bridal party, preceded by a troup of bright-eyed children strewing flowers on their path, approached and surrounded the altar where stood the venerable pastor in gown and band waiting with uplifted hands to bless the sacred rite. Six rosy maidens, the favored playmates of Nellie's youth, clad in white flowing robes, stood beside the dark-eyed bride, who leaned with an air of serenity and peace upon the arm of her betrothed. Suddenly a soft strain of melody floated through the air, and, catching up the refrain, every lip joined in the touching, graceful tribute of love.

A few simple words spoken—the trembling responses uttered — the nuptial benediction pronounced with a pathos which drew unbidden tears from many an eye, and Augustus Murray proudly led forth *his wife* to share forever after his weal or woe.

"Mine now past all recall," he fondly whispered as they emerged from the church door, and the sun poured down its golden baptism upon their heads.

A thrilling glance of tenderness and confiding love was Nellie's only reply; yet it told him more plainly than words that her heart wished no recall from its new-found rest and home.

"There!" exclaimed Molly as her straining eye caught the last glimpse of the receding carriages which bore away the newly-wedded pair with the good Doctor and his wife, "they've got clear out o' sight now! O dear! I feel jest as if I couldn't do nothin' but set right down and cry. I never knowed afore how much I liked that Nellie. As I's sayin' to Judith Pease t'other day: 'Judy,' said I to her, 'I'd ruther have Mr. Murray cut off one o' my fingers this minnit than to carry off our Nell.' But he's gone and done it, so there an't no use in my cryin' over it, I s'pose. Let's see what that paper was he gin you, John, jest's he went off."

"I don't care nothin' 'bout papers now," muttered John, who had been sitting with his face covered in both hands upon his knees.

"'Tan't no use to take on so," said Molly kindly; "it's nat'ral, you know, for folks to git married. I kind o' wish Nell had got a rich man, though."

"Poh! she'd ruther have a good one any time. Here, take the paper if you want it, Molly. I don't care for nothin' now."

"Law's sakes! what's all this! Do, for gracious sake, look a-here, John!" cried Molly with amazement as she opened the parcel.

John slowly raised his head; but as his eye caught sight of the contents, his dejection gave way to utter astonishment.

"Money!" he exclaimed; "where on airth did that

come from? and this big lookin' paper? Lem me see. Goodness gracious, Molly, if here an't a deed of that 'ere cottage, and money enuf to stock it with! Do read this ere writin'. My eyes is gittin' kind o' weak latterly, I reckon."

"*For those faithful friends of my beloved wife, John and Molly Hawkins. A debt of gratitude well deserved and cheerfully repaid.*"

"There, John Hawkins, didn't I never tell ye we was entertainin' angels unawares when we took care of the old fortin'-teller? Nobody never loses nothin' by doin' their duty. What a sight o' picters he must have painted to git all this money, though! Wal, the Lord bless him. He's got a good wife, any how, and I guess as how they're deserving of each other. Come, John, don't stan' there like a stater. Let's go and see our new home. What will Judy say, though?"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"RETRIBUTION speeds its arrow
To the heart that spurned its prize:
Now, pale victim I see her o'er thee,
In unconscious triumph rise."

FOR a few weeks previous to the events in the last chapter, fashionable society in Philadelphia had been thrown into a state of feverish expectation by a rumor that their quiet city was to be honored by a visit from one of the nobility from England. Suites of rooms at one of their first hotels had been fitted up in princely style for his lordship's use, and liveried servants having in charge a vast amount of luggage, had already arrived and installed themselves in their apartments, to await the coming of their master. At length, cards of invitation were issued by Capt. Waters and lady, for a grand reception of the distinguished foreigners, Lord and Lady Stratherne; and eager preparations were at once commenced for a brilliant display of fashion and beauty.

Meanwhile, the little bridal party approached the close of their long and wearisome journey. As they neared the suburbs of the city, Mr. Murray ordered the

driver to draw up before the door of a comfortable-looking inn, and turning towards Mrs. Jepson with a meaning look, he said; "Had we not better alight here and refresh ourselves awhile before proceeding to your sister's? For my part, I feel the need of exchanging these dusty and travel-soiled garments to render me at all presentable, and I have no doubt Nellie does also."

"Your pride is not to be wondered at," Mrs. Jepson replied smiling; "but as we older ones have no such particular reason for desiring to appear in our best, perhaps you will excuse us if we go on and announce your arrival."

"That's the best way, Mr. Murray," said the Doctor, stretching himself with a weary movement; "for my part, I'm quite impatient to get to Lyddy's, where we can rest as long as we like."

"What says my Nellie?" Mr. Murray asked, looking tenderly at his wife; "for, after all, it is she who must decide."

"Consult your own wishes, Augustus," said she; "I am ready to go on or remain, as you please."

"Come, then," said he, assisting her to alight; "and you good people will please to inform Mrs. Waters that we will see her this evening."

Nellie was a little puzzled at this unexpected movement, but she entered the house leaning upon her husband's arm with a cheerful though wearied look.

"Now rest you, my love," said he when they had

reached their room, "and when you are sufficiently refreshed, I have a little explanation to make to you."

"You can not know much of woman's curiosity if you imagine I can sit calmly down to rest after such an intimation," Nellie playfully replied; "so the little explanation first, if you please, and the rest afterwards."

Mr. Murray leaned his head upon his hand thoughtfully for a moment, as if in doubt what to say.

"Come," she urged; "I shall really think it is something serious if you look so. Pray begin."

"I scarcely know how, and yet, Nellie, what should you say if you knew I had been practicing a deception towards you all the while?"

"A deception! Augustus? What do you mean?" Nellie's face paled as she regarded him with astonishment.

"What if you should find that your husband had another name and station besides that in which he wooed and won his bride?"

"So that the name were untarnished and the station one in which there was no dishonor, I could excuse it, though it were better far that the *truth* should not have been withheld," Nellie replied in a low voice, while the tears gathered in her eye.

"Nor would it have been withheld, dearest, save that I wished to win a wife who would love me for myself alone. Listen now, and let that *truthful* nature of yours suspend its judgment till you know all. I am

an only child, and my mother one of the choicest spirits of earth. In that I have not deceived you, as you will find when she welcomes to her arms the daughter she has already learned to love. But, Nellie, you are not the wife of a poor artist, as I have allowed you to believe till now."

"Not the wife of a poor artist!" she exclaimed, interrupting him; "who then are you, Augustus?"

There was a tinge of reproach in her tone as she spoke.

"I am a husband proud and happy to bestow upon my wife a name and position she will both adorn and exalt. My father is a noble earl, Nellie, and you, my chosen one, are the bride of his only child, Lord Stratherne! Never have the courtly halls of my ancestors received a fairer, lovelier mistress than they will claim in my own, my peerless Nellie."

"You astound, you bewilder me!" cried Nellie, scarce comprehending his words. "You surely can not be deceiving me again, and yet I would you were."

"Ah! say not so, Nellie! you distress me beyond measure! Did you not promise to be mine in weal or woe?"

"But the poor mountain girl is no fit bride for one of noble birth. Your father, you say, is a noble earl; surely he would scorn to receive *me* beneath his roof. O Augustus! why did you not tell me this before?"

"If I had, would my Nellie have rejected my suit? Would she have made my birth a curse to me?"

"But your father ——"

"My father has heard your whole history, Nellie, and he fully agrees with me in believing that there is a nobility of character far transcending that of birth. 'Twas that which drew me to you, dearest, and to which I now look for the forgiveness I crave. Be to me still the simple mountain girl I worshiped; retract not that holy vow which filled my heart with such perfect bliss on our bridal morn. Let your lips once more utter those blessed words so fraught with meaning: 'Where thou goest, I will go, and where thou abidest, there will I abide; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.' Can you not do so, Nellie, or have I forfeited your confidence by what I thought an innocent, harmless deception?"

"Forgive me, Augustus!" cried Nellie, unable to resist his earnest, passionate appeal; "I was wrong to distrust your noble heart even for a moment; but this is so strange, so sudden, I know not what to say or think."

"Say that you are as ready to share my lot now as when you thought it was more humble. Say that you will arise in all your queenly dignity and show to the world how a high and lofty nature may rise superior to their false and shallow codes. Receive this as your mission, and fulfill it as only my incomparable Nellie can."

Nellie leaned her head upon her husband's shoulder overcome with conflicting emotions. At length she exclaimed with sudden energy:

"Heaven knows I would rather have shared the humble obscurity I had thought were yours, Augustus, than the brilliant position in which your generous-hearted kindness would place me; but heaven helping me, I will try to be all you wish. Only let your heart ever deal kindly with my imperfections."

"My glorious Nellie! now you are indeed your own noble self again," cried Mr. Murray, tenderly embracing her; "and you freely pardon me?"

"As fully and freely as I love you," she replied; "but it all seems like some strange dream."

"Let us make it seem more real, then," said he, going towards a closet and throwing open the door; "here you will find a traveling costume such as Lady Stratherne should wear; and when we reach our hotel, you will see that your ladyship's arrival has been anticipated."

"You have carried out your stratagem perfectly, I see," said Nellie, spreading out an elegant dress before her.

"Yes, with the aid of our good friends, Mrs. Waters and the Doctor and his wife."

"What! do they know? Ah! now I understand why they left us here. A well-planned conspiracy, truly."

"I could not suffer you to go on till I had made this disclosure and sought your forgiveness; that obtained, and my Nellie arrayed in becoming robes, we will proceed as soon as you are sufficiently rested, for our

servants are already here awaiting our pleasure. By the way, I must introduce them to their new mistress, whom they have crossed the ocean to escort to her new home."

One would have thought her "to the manor born," so quietly and gracefully did Nellie assume the honors of her position. Even the argus-eyed servants were satisfied with the courtly grace and polished manners of their young Lord's bride. . . .

"What a perfect *furore* there is about those foreigners!" Walter Everson impatiently exclaimed, throwing his paper down as he sat at breakfast one morning. "There's nothing else talked about in the streets or on 'Change, and the papers are full of it. One gets fairly disgusted with the *servility* of some people; for my part, I shall be glad when the Waters' grand reception is over, curiosity satisfied, and society restored once more to its equilibrium."

"It may have an opposite effect," his mother smilingly replied; "if the rumors of her youthful ladyship's beauty are but half-true, it will turn all the gentlemen's heads—yours included, perhaps."

"There's no danger of that, mother," said Walter with a sigh; "there's but one face on earth that could move me, and that I shall never see again."

"I am sorry you can not banish that girl from your mind, Walter," Mrs. Everson gently rejoined.

"I have been reminded lately of my adventures in the mountain many years ago by the reception of the money I left with my physician there for the purpose of educating her. 'Tis like her proud nature to return it; but I could not think of retaining it, and therefore I have placed it where I trust it may do good to many another orphan heart."

"And where I trust your generosity will not again be followed by such fearful results. Now, my son, I hope you will try to forget her. It would greatly facilitate your recovery if you could."

"I shall never be well again, mother. The seeds of disease have been too deeply implanted in my system; but I would not exchange the peace of mind I have gained for the bodily health I once enjoyed."

"I think, Walter, you pore too much over your own thoughts. It would be better for you to go into society more. Come, let us attend Mrs. Waters' *soirée* and get a glimpse of the famous strangers."

"I will accompany you if you wish, mother, but I have not the slightest desire to see them."

"Go, then, for my sake," said Mrs. Everson as he arose to leave the room. "Poor fellow!" she sighed when he had gone, "how that disappointment preys upon him! It seems almost like retributive justice for the wrongs Esther Morrison suffered from his father's family. If I had only known sooner that the girl descended from such a source, it might all have been otherwise and he made happy. I believe I shall, un-

known to him, make another appeal to her to change her decision. 'Tis a humiliating task, but what will a mother not do to save her child?"

At length the evening so eagerly looked forward to arrived, and Mrs. Waters' elegant drawing-rooms presented a scene of unrivaled splendor with its gay and brilliant throng. Music wafted its softest, most ravishing strains upon the ear; costly perfumes filled the air with delicate fragrance, while like fairies floating in clouds of mist, forms of beauty glided around in airy robes of white, lending to the enchantment the witchery of their smiles and blushes. Mrs. Waters might well receive her guests with proud satisfaction, for never, even in that polished city, had such a *recherché* assemblage been gathered beneath one roof. Nor did it lessen her gratification that these honors were not for her; she had a dearer object at heart.

Meanwhile, as the confused murmur of voices had gradually increased and expectation was at its hight, the doors were suddenly thrown open and a liveried footman announced "Lord and Lady Stratherne."

An involuntary burst of admiration sprang to every lip as the distinguished strangers advanced and were led by the lady-like hostess to some seats which had been prepared for them at the farther end of the room, where the ceremony of introduction might more easily take place. Lord Stratherne appeared in full court

dress, and the trembling bride, whom he so tenderly supported on his arm, was arrayed in almost regal magnificence. Over a stiff brocade she wore a robe of Mechlin lace of finest texture, which fell in soft and graceful folds around her form. From her dark hair flowed the bridal vail exquisitely inwrought with threads of gold and confined to the head by a coronal of rich gems, which gleamed and flashed from out the raven braids like stars in a midnight sky. Upon her neck, breast, and arms diamonds of rare value sparkled —heir-looms in the young nobleman's family, which had decked many a high-born bride, but never one fairer or more loved than Nellie. Thus, like a queen, she stood amidst those from whom she had once fled in humiliating grief. But there was no exultant feeling in her breast. Her simple, childlike nature cared for the splendor and pomp which surrounded her only so far as it pleased him whom she loved; she would rather far have quietly gone with him to their distant home; but her noble husband would show to that world which derided her, that he had proudly placed in his bosom the precious jewel upon which they trampled.

Little did the obsequious, fawning crowd, who poured such adulation into her ear, imagine that it was to the scorned outcast mountain girl they were paying such homage. Little, too, did Walter Everson dream of what awaited him when, pale and spiritless, he en tered the brilliantly-lighted rooms with his mother and

proceeded to pay his devoirs to the hostess and her illustrious guests.

"Ah! Mr. Everson!" exclaimed a beautiful girl as the crowd impeded his way, "your flinty heart will surely be touched now. Lady Stratherne is the most beautiful creature I ever saw."

"I am invincible, you know," he playfully replied; "so her ladyship's charms must fall harmless upon me."

"Not unless you are as obdurate as that marble statue," she added. "I have almost expected to see it descend from its pedestal and bend before such a shrine."

"If such be the power of her beauty," said he, "it may be dangerous; but as you have forewarned me, I think I can proceed with safety. Come, mother, shall we venture nearer that charmed presence?"

What a dull, stupid thing he has become!" exclaimed the thoughtless girl to one of her companions; "I dare say he will be perfectly unmoved by her glorious loveliness."

Nellie stood with her back partly turned towards Walter Everson as he approached.

"There *is* something regal in her appearance," he said in a low voice to his mother; "that head so perfectly turned — the proud and graceful curve of her neck, and her form and dress are queenly too."

"Noble birth betrays itself in unmistakable signs," his mother replied in the same tone. "I have always noticed it."

"Ah!" exclaimed Mrs. Waters, coming hastily towards them at that moment, "I did not know you had arrived. "Permit me to introduce to you our noble guests, Lord and Lady Stratherne."

Nellie turned with a graceful bow, and for a moment their eyes met. Her radiant beauty gleamed upon his bewildered senses like the last ray of light from Paradise, and then a cold shudder crept shudderingly over him.

"Nellie! O my God!" he almost shrieked, and sank at her feet in a death-like swoon.

Nellie clung in terror to her husband as they bore out the unconscious form of him who had so coldly deserted her in her hour of trial, and whose voice she now first heard in that wail of agony from a breaking heart. Well did she remember whose arm had then sustained her stricken form and whose voice so nobly plead her cause; and turning to him on whose arm she leaned, she murmured with a look of unutterable love:

"My best and truest friend — faithful alike in sunshine or storm."

"'Twas the storm out of which came my bow of promise," he fondly replied. "Nevermore may its darkness overwhelm thee, my noble wife."

The strange secret Walter Everson so unwittingly betrayed quickly passed from lip to lip, gaining new strength as it went, till, at last, the lovely Lady Stratherne was pronounced a heroine, and new laurels were laid upon her brow.

Such was Nellie's triumph! such the victory her fearless spirit gained when it scorned to sell its birthright for even the precious boon of earthly love. But in that hour when fortune well-nigh overwhelmed her with its lavish gifts; when friends caressed and every face was wreathed in smiles; when true loving hearts gathered rejoicingly around to share her joy, her filial thoughts flew far away to a lonely mountain grave, and her heart laid its first tribute upon that sacred mound.

CHAPTER XXIX.

"Like earth's horizon, be their scene
Of life a rich and various ground;
And, whether lowering or serene,
Heaven all above it and around.

"When land and ocean, day and night,
When years and nature cease to be,
May their inheritance be light,
Their union, one eternity."

A beautiful vessel lay moored amidst the forest of ships which line the harbor of New-York, gracefully swaying with each undulation of the sea, as she awaited her precious freight. Many an admiring glance did the jolly tars alongside cast upon her noble proportions, her rare workmanship, and many a conjecture arose as to her probable destination. Nor was their curiosity lessened when, one day towards noon, a party of ladies and gentlemen, with a large retinue of servants, came on board and descended to the spacious saloon, where a sumptuous banquet had been prepared for them.

It was a cheerful company that thus gathered around the table, loaded with the choicest viands and the rarest delicacies which wealth could command; but 'twas a cheerfulness tempered with such sadness as the hour of

parting always brings. Lord Stratherne, the noble host, and his lovely bride were that day to set sail for his princely home, and though hope spread its bright pinions and soaringly pointed to the future—though peace laid its baptismal blessing upon her brow—though her life seemed just entering upon its full fruition of earthly joy, Nellie could not part from those to whom she owed such blessings without a pang. And to those who had adopted the orphan into their hearts and home, it was like sundering the parental tie, when they looked forth upon the broad expanse of ocean, and thought how soon its fathomless waters would roll between them. But, however deep the emotions of the heart, every one seemed heroically determined that this last hour should not be spent in vain repinings or useless regrets.

"Don't you recollect, Nellie," said Doctor Jepson, making a strong effort to keep down the rising in his throat, "how you used to long to sail upon the water? You little thought then that your first voyage would be as the queen of such a floating palace as this, did you?"

"My life has been one continued series of unexpected blessings," Nellie replied with deep feeling.

"And you have been a continual blessing to us all," he added. "Mr. Murray—Lord Stratherne, I mean—you are taking a precious jewel from us; but I know you well enough to feel that it will be carefully guarded, as of more value than all your other treasures."

"Comparing Nellie with earthly possessions, how-

ever costly or prized, would give but a faint idea of my appreciation of the treasure you have committed to my keeping," Lord Stratherne replied, looking tenderly at his wife; "but may we not hope, my dear sir, that another season will bring you to our home, when you can judge for yourself whether I have faithfully fulfilled my promises to you and her?"

"We'll see, we'll see," said the Doctor; "'twould be a great undertaking for Betsy and I both; but I reckon we shall be willing to do most any thing, to get a sight of our Nellie's face once more, by the time spring comes."

"I've formed a nice plan for us all," said Mrs. Waters, addressing the company; "and if it meets your sanction we will consider it settled. We'll all take passage with my husband on his next voyage, and make our friends here a bridal call."

"Capital! capital!" echoed all around, while Nellie's face beamed with joy.

"O Aunt Waters!" she cried, "how very kind in you to think of that! it will lessen the pain of parting, if we may look forward with such a hope."

"Your suggestion is too delightful to allow of any doubts as to its success," added her husband; "we will promise to canonize you as our patron-saint, if you will carry it out."

"And get us there and back again safely, I should wish to add," said Mrs. Jepson, smiling.

"Gim-i-*ni*! Lyddy," cried the Doctor, "you've really

brightened us all up with your idea; just in the right time, too, for I suppose it's about time for us to say 'Good-by,' isn't it, Mr. Murray—Lord Stratherne, I mean."

"Pray do not correct yourself again, sir; titles will do for strangers to use towards each other, but between such friends as you and I, they should be set aside. I regret to say that the time of our separation has indeed come, as the tide is now fully up, and we must go out with it, or we shall be obliged to wait another day. I can not trust myself to say all there is in my heart at this moment, my dear sir; but never, never shall I cease to hold you in grateful remembrance while I live. And to you, ladies, who have been such angels of mercy to my beloved Nellie, I would that I could render such thanks as you merit, but noble deeds ever bring their own reward. May heaven bless you! Come, Nellie, be a brave girl now, and say farewell to our friends; next spring we will hope to welcome them to our own shore."

"Pray don't forget to bring John and Molly with you," added Nellie, smiling through her tears.

No need of words, where each could read the other's heart, as those who wept in that silent farewell embrace; no *uttered* blessing could have such power to move the soul, as from each spirit breathed in that sad hour. 'Twas hard to part, and yet there was joy in their sorrow, for such a crowning of their labors.

Away over the treacherous waves sped the gallant bark which bore from the straining gaze of those who watched on shore the loved one, whom in blessing they had found themselves so richly blessed; away, till like a speck on the broad ocean the preciously laden vessel seemed; and then the little group turned with saddened hearts and tearful faces to seek their homes from whence the light had fled.

Back to those mountain scenes, now doubly endeared to them by the remembrance of a young life whose early blight it had been their blessed privilege to remove, and whose innate beauty their loving, judicious nurture had drawn forth; those scenes which had witnessed their saving mission to the misguided outcast of those wild crags, so gloriously fulfilled, the Doctor and his patient, gentle wife slowly wended their way. Not to sit down in idleness, and enjoy the well-earned reward of their noble deeds; nor to selfishly mourn, though their home seemed lonely, and they sadly missed the sweet voice which had so long cheered their hearts; nor did they labor under the delusive expectation that all their efforts must meet with the same signal results; but cheerfully and gratefully did they commence anew their quiet, unobtrusive life of usefulness, searching out the hidden corners where misery conceals itself, and illumining the dark abodes of sin and of sorrow by the light of their Christian example.

There let us leave them, secure in the favor of God and rich in the prayers and blessings of many who will,

in the last great day, bear joyful testimony to their fidelity.

. . . . . .

In a darkly curtained chamber, shut out from all sights and sounds, save the soft tread and anxious faces of those who watched around his bed, Walter Everson lay, prostrated once more by the hand of sickness. The sudden shock of meeting Nellie again under such peculiar circumstances had been too great for his already shattered constitution, causing the rupture of a blood-vessel, from which he was slowly recovering.

Not an allusion to the subject had passed his lips since that terrible evening, and his mother would fain delude herself with the thought that all had been forgotten in the unconsciousness that followed. Great, therefore, was her consternation when, one day, the servant entered the sick-room, and handing her a card, added that "the lady below wished to see Mr. Everson also."

"Who is it, mother?" Walter languidly asked.

"No one whom you care to see just now," she replied evasively; "I will go down and make your apology."

"Give me the card," said he, taking it from her trembling hand. "Mrs. Waters! just the one I long most to see!" he exclaimed earnestly; "show her up here at once."

"But, my son ——" Mrs. Everson began remonstratingly.

"I know all you would say, mother, but you can not

know all I have thought and felt as I lay here; it will not agitate me now, for I have learned to view my fate calmly, and to acknowledge its justice."

The entrance of Mrs. Waters interrupted them, and Mrs. Everson rose to greet her visitor with a forced composure she was far from feeling.

"I heard you were ill, Mr. Everson," said Mrs. Waters, taking Walter's proffered hand, "and I have lost no time since my return in calling to ascertain the truth of the report."

A painful flush crossed Walter Everson's brow when she addressed him, but it was quickly succeeded by a smile, as he replied: "You were right, madam, not to trust to rumor; pray be seated—you are very welcome."

There was an awkward pause for a few moments, while each seemed struggling with some secret thought or feeling.

"I have called," at length Mrs. Waters began, in a low, firm voice, turning towards Mrs. Everson, to apologize for what might seem a thoughtless if not cruel attempt to injure the feelings of yourself and your son. I had not thought, (if you will allow me to speak plainly upon such a delicate subject,) I had not dreamed that he looked upon Nellie with any other than a feeling of aversion, since that mortifying denouement under this roof, and, with a pardonable pride, I wished to show him and the rest of the world that there were those who appreciated her worth. But had I supposed that

the unexpected revelation of her brilliant destiny would have so overwhelmed him, I should most assuredly have prevented such a catastrophe. As it is, I can only express my deep regret at the unfortunate occurrence, and beg that you will not think me guilty of a desire to wound or grieve you."

"Let me speak, mother, if you please," said Walter, as Mrs. Everson was about to reply. "It is a painful subject to me, Mrs. Waters, as you may well imagine," he continued, "and one upon which my tongue must ever after this be sacredly sealed. But for this once, I will confess frankly that though the happiness of my life is the sacrifice, *pride has had its just punishment.* I stifled those pure and noble instincts which are implanted in every man's breast; I suffered the film of earthly dross to grow over my eyes, hiding nature's best and rarest gifts; I bowed to the fiat of a heartless world, though it rent my soul with agony; and I saw the blight fall upon one whom I loved, while in cowardly fear I withheld the protecting arm I even then longed to throw around her. No wonder Nellie learned to despise me; no wonder he who bravely stood forth her sole champion in that dark hour should have gathered the rich treasure of her love to himself; he is worthy of her, and I—I am suffering the just reward of my folly."

"Say rather you are suffering for my sins," Mrs. Everson rejoined with deep feeling; "I can not sit calmly by, my son, and hear you condemn yourself,

when all the while my conscience reproves me for being the cause of your troubles. My false teachings have done their work; they have wrecked a happiness dearer to me than my own. Walter, Walter, can you forgive me?"

"We have both, I trust, sought and obtained forgiveness from a higher source," Walter calmly replied; "henceforth our lives must prove the sincerity of our sorrow."

"I can not longer intrude upon your confidence," said Mrs. Waters, rising to go. "Mr. Everson, you have now nobly redeemed the past, in my estimation; may you find much peace and happiness in the future; and to you, my dear Mrs. Everson, I can not wish a greater joy than that the light which now shines upon your path may be continued to the end."

Walter Everson rose from that sick-bed at last, a sadder and a wiser man. No dream of love had ever power again to charm his heart; no syren voice could lure a smile from his grave face; but submissively and silently he trod his lonely path, patiently awaiting that rest which alone could bring *forgetfulness*.

. . . . . .

Tenderly as a young child upon its mother's breast did old ocean bear that freighted vessel towards its destined port; gently did it rock the frail bark in its mighty cradle, hushing its hoarse, wild winds to soft and soothing lullabies, as by some potent spell its maddening waves were charmed to rest. At last they

neared the shore, and Nellie looked forth upon the land of her adoption.

"You'll never find another mountain scene like that we've left behind," said her husband, as they stood side by side, watching the landscape as it gradually unfolded to their view; "will not my Nellie pine for old familiar haunts?"

"Not if her heart has found its *true* home and rest," she replied; "but oh! if your parents should ——"

"There, I can not allow you to finish that sentence," he interrupted, playfully placing his hand over her mouth; "you must not wrong my noble parents by such unworthy thoughts; in a few hours you'll find yourself *at home*, and then we'll see. There are the carriages now, awaiting us on shore, which will quickly bear us to our journey's end. Bravely now, my Nellie! throw aside those foolish fancies, and be your own self, strong, loving, and true."

A princely welcome awaited the young lord and his bride, when they reached their home; but not all the pomp and show, the magnificence and splendor of the ovation, brought such reässuring joy to the stranger's heart as those few whispered words which fell from the mother's lips: "*Welcome home, my daughter.*" Home! she had already found it in that mother's warm embrace; she had read it in the father's loving eye, and her soul was satisfied. Wealth and honor might thickly strew her path with their gifts, adulation pour its honeyed words like incense at her feet, yet, ever true to

that pure and native instinct which led her childish heart to plead for love, the beautiful Lady Stratherne lived only in the smiles of affection—as eager to dwell in the *hearts* of those around her as was of old "WILD NELL, THE WHITE MOUNTAIN GIRL."

Princeton University Library
32101 063607954

[redacted]

3864
57
.397

3864.57.397

[redacted]

3864.57.397
Moore
Wild Nell, the White Mountain girl

DATE ISSUED	DATE DUE	DATE ISSUED	DATE DUE